



From the #1 New York Times best-selling writer of *Saga*, *Y: The Last Man*, and *Ex Machina*

BRIAN K. VAUGHAN NIKO HENRICHON

PRIDE OF BAGHDAD

THE DELUXE EDITION

VERTIGO

کبریا بغداد



APPRIAL

of
baghdad

كبرياء بغداد

PRIDE OF BAGHDAD THE DELUXE EDITION

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PRIDE OF BAGHDAD: THE DELUXE EDITION

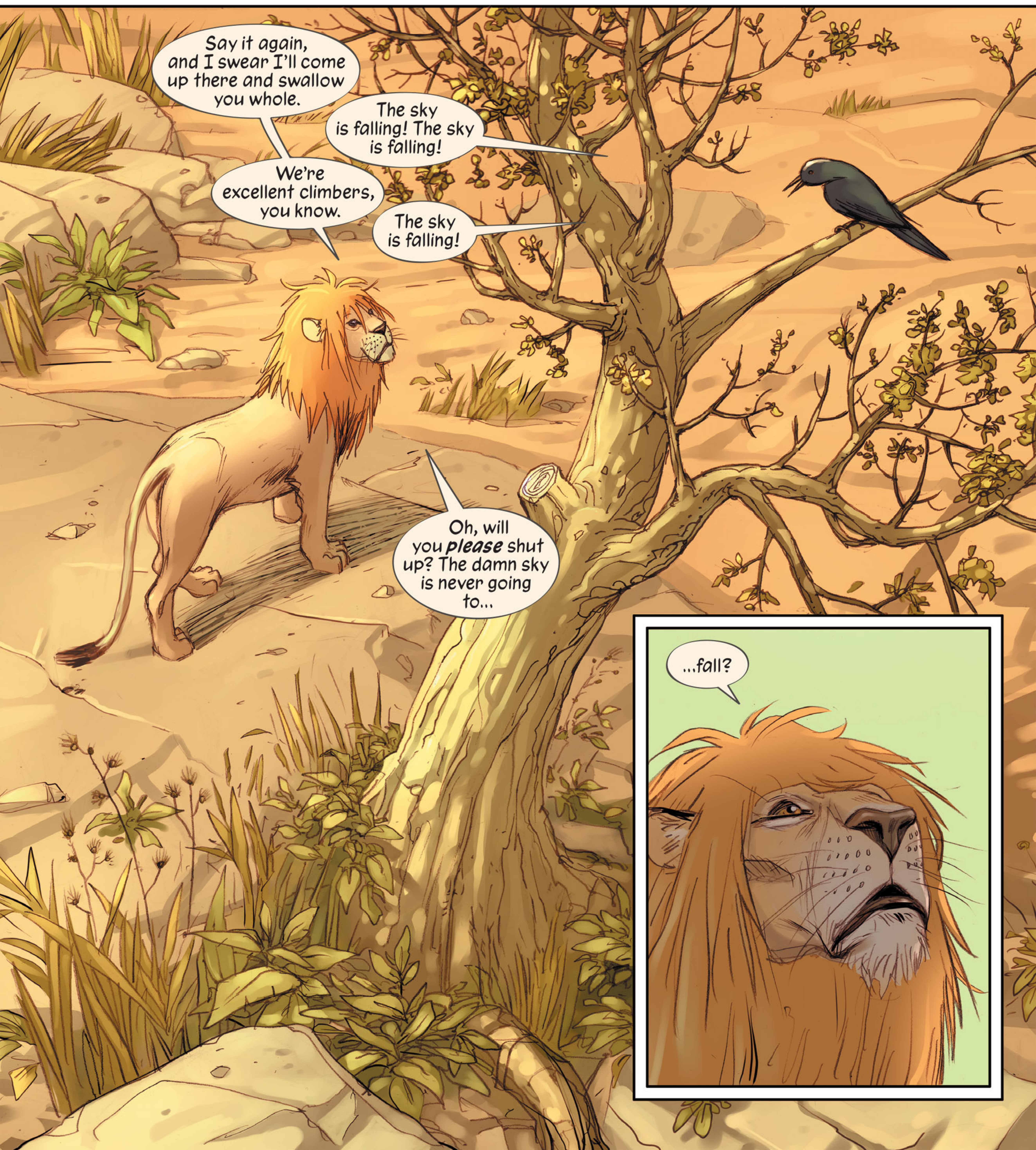
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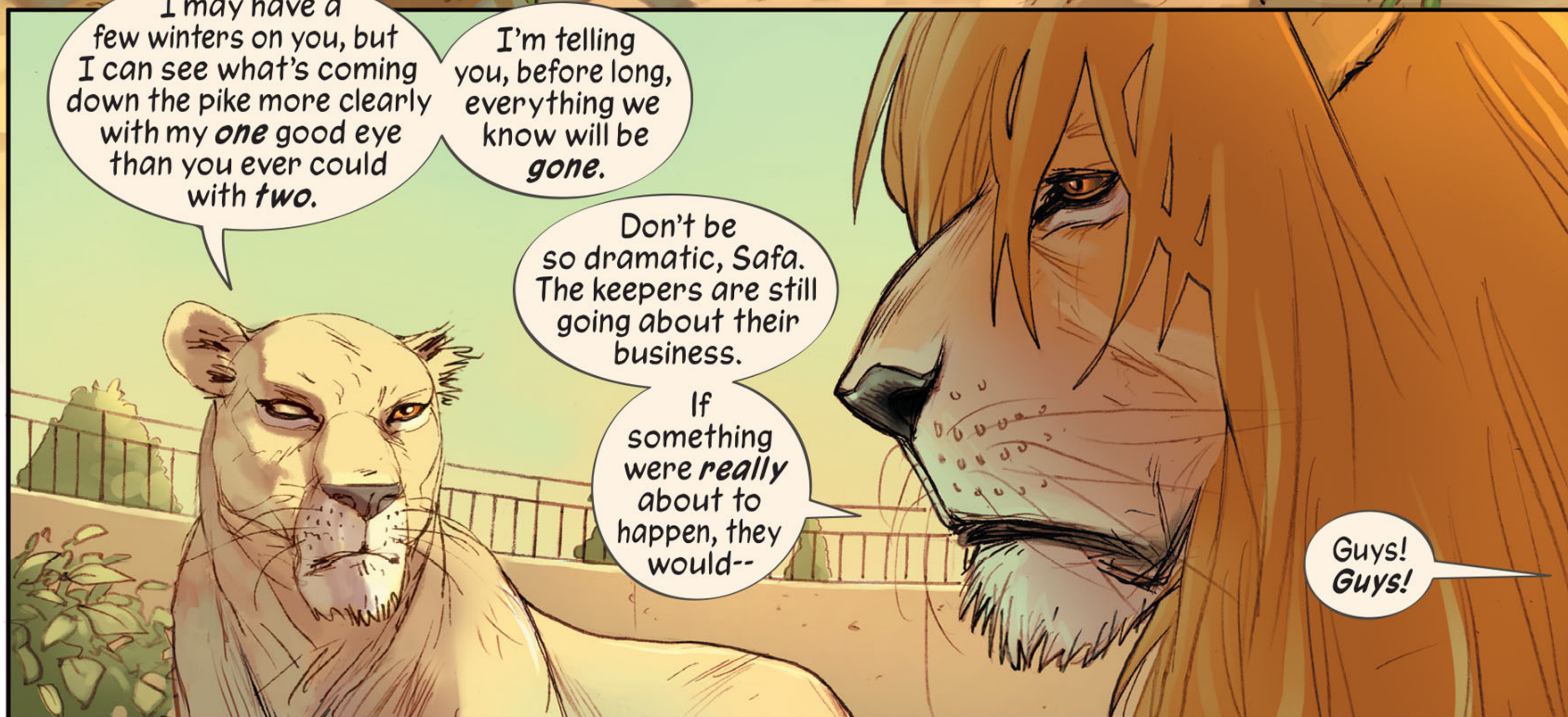
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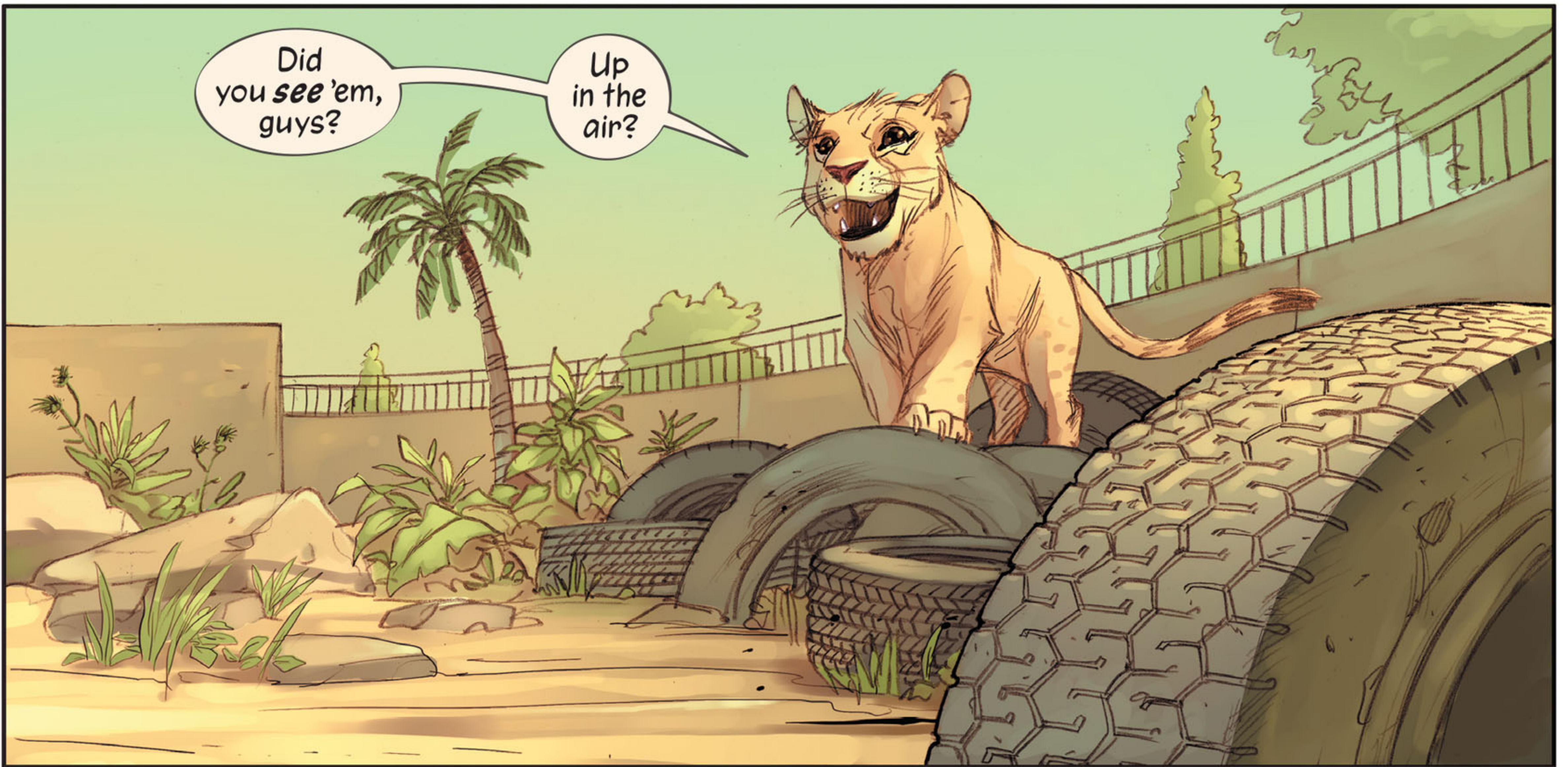
**For Daniel M. Kanemoto
— Brian K. Vaughan**

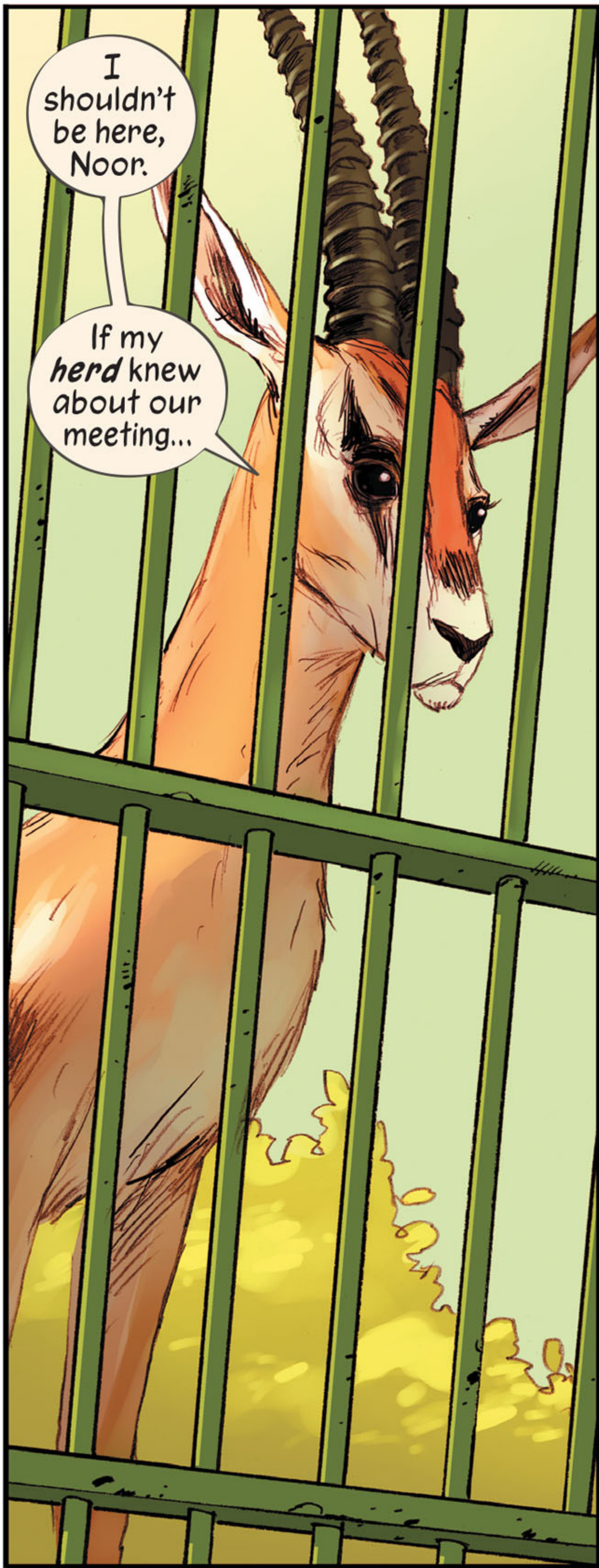
**For Laëtitia Cassan
— Niko Henrichon**











I shouldn't be here, Noor.

If my *herd* knew about our meeting...



This isn't the time for old grudges, antelope.

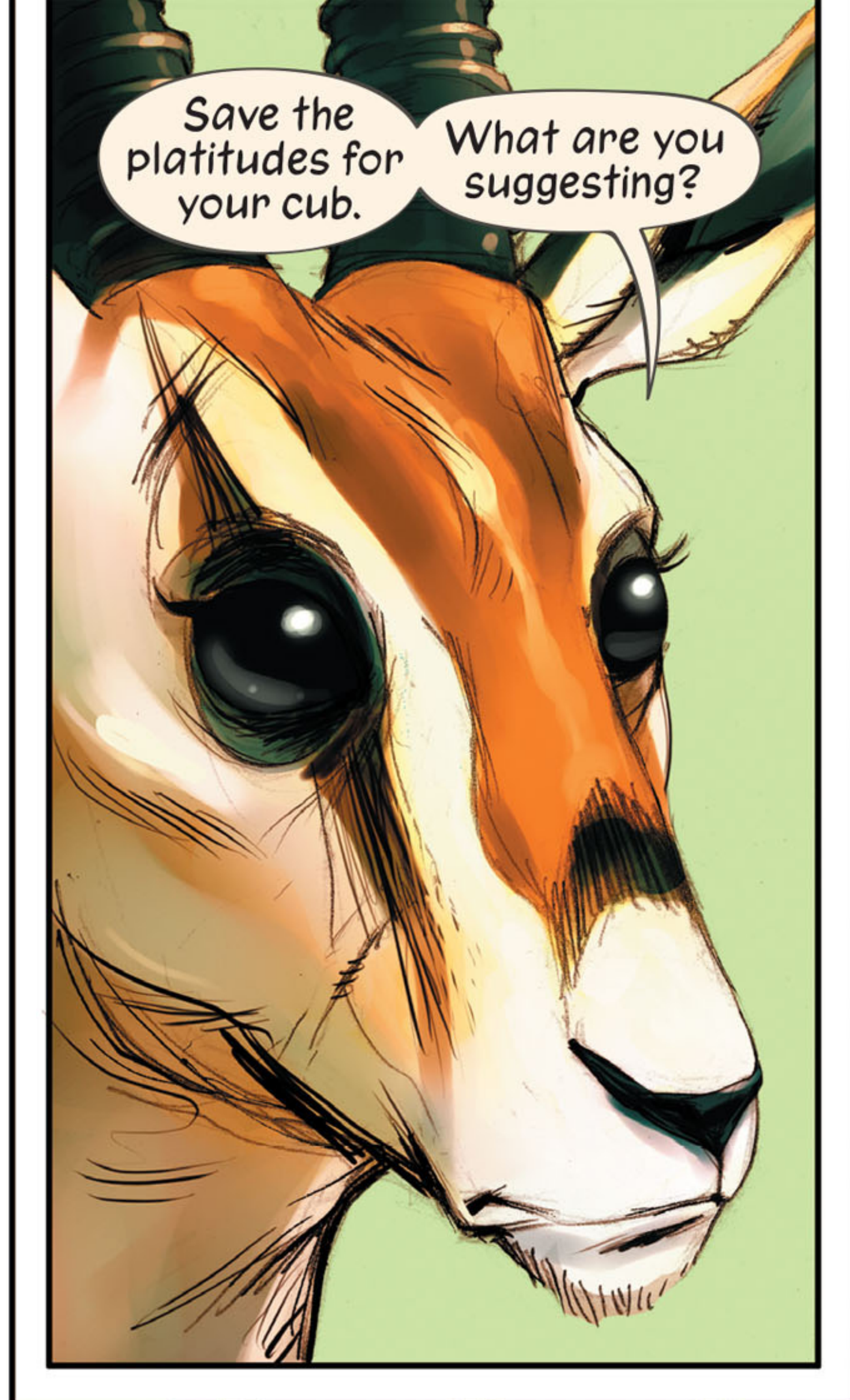
Not when *liberation* is within our reach.



Liberation? But the *birds* are saying--

To *hell* with the birds!

We can't wait around for some *miracle* to change the world *for* us. We have to take control of our *own* destinies!



Save the platitudes for your cub.

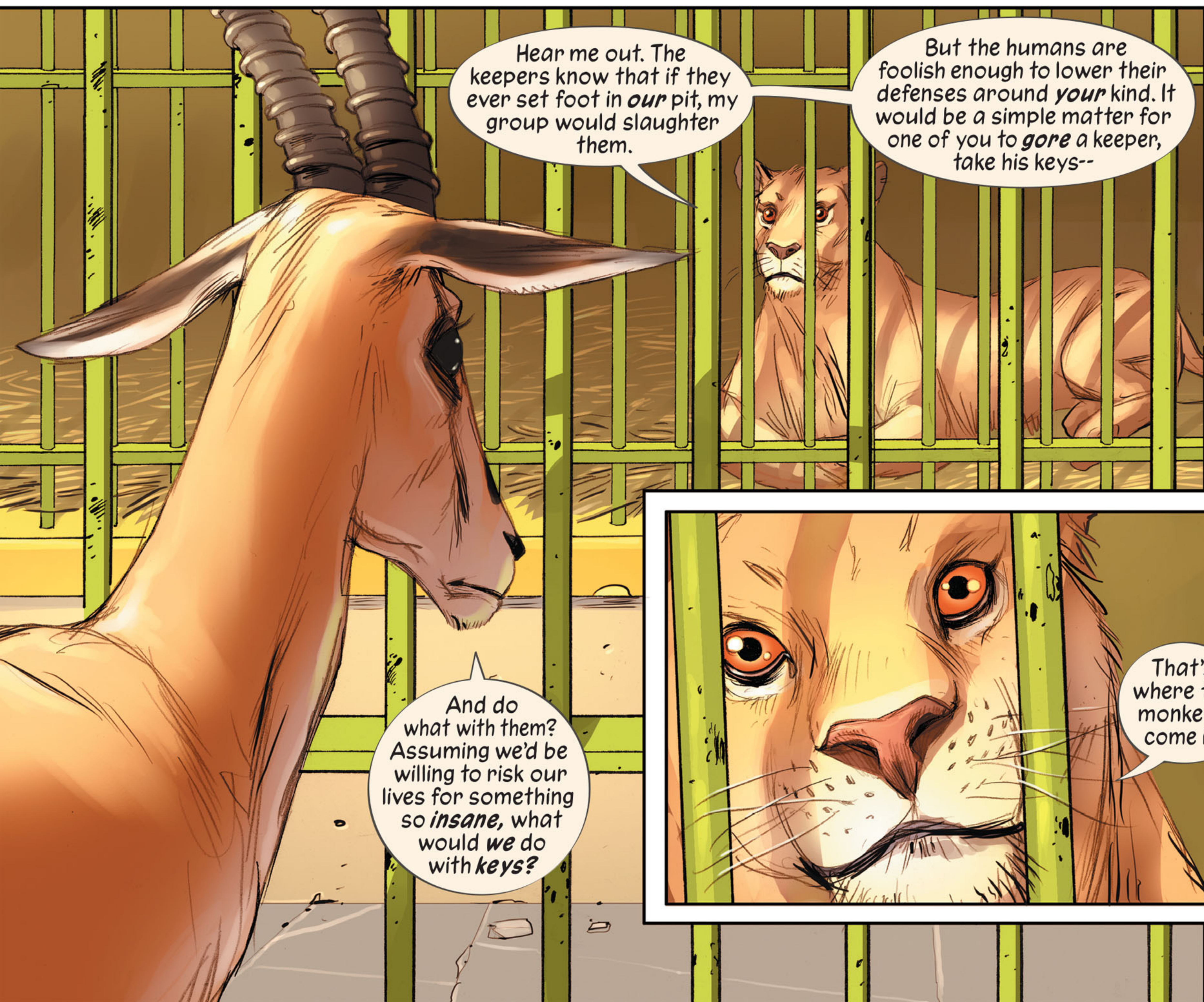
What are you suggesting?



You, me, the camels, the mountain goats, *all* of us... we've spent too long bickering with each other when we only have one real enemy - *the keepers*.

If we work together, I think we can take them.

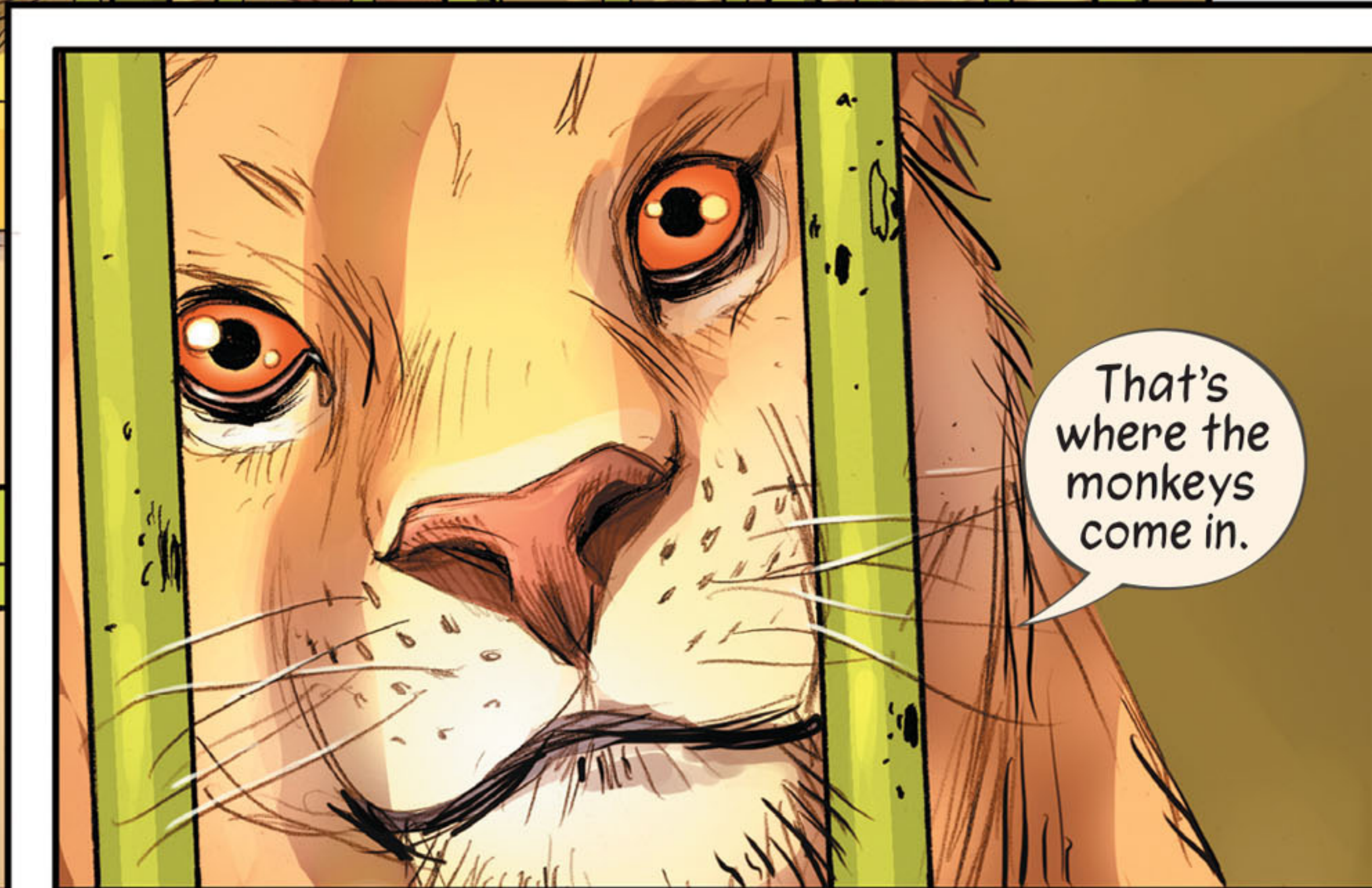
Don't be ridiculous.



Hear me out. The keepers know that if they ever set foot in *our* pit, my group would slaughter them.

But the humans are foolish enough to lower their defenses around *your* kind. It would be a simple matter for one of you to *gore* a keeper, take his keys--

And do what with them? Assuming we'd be willing to risk our lives for something so *insane*, what would *we* do with *keys*?



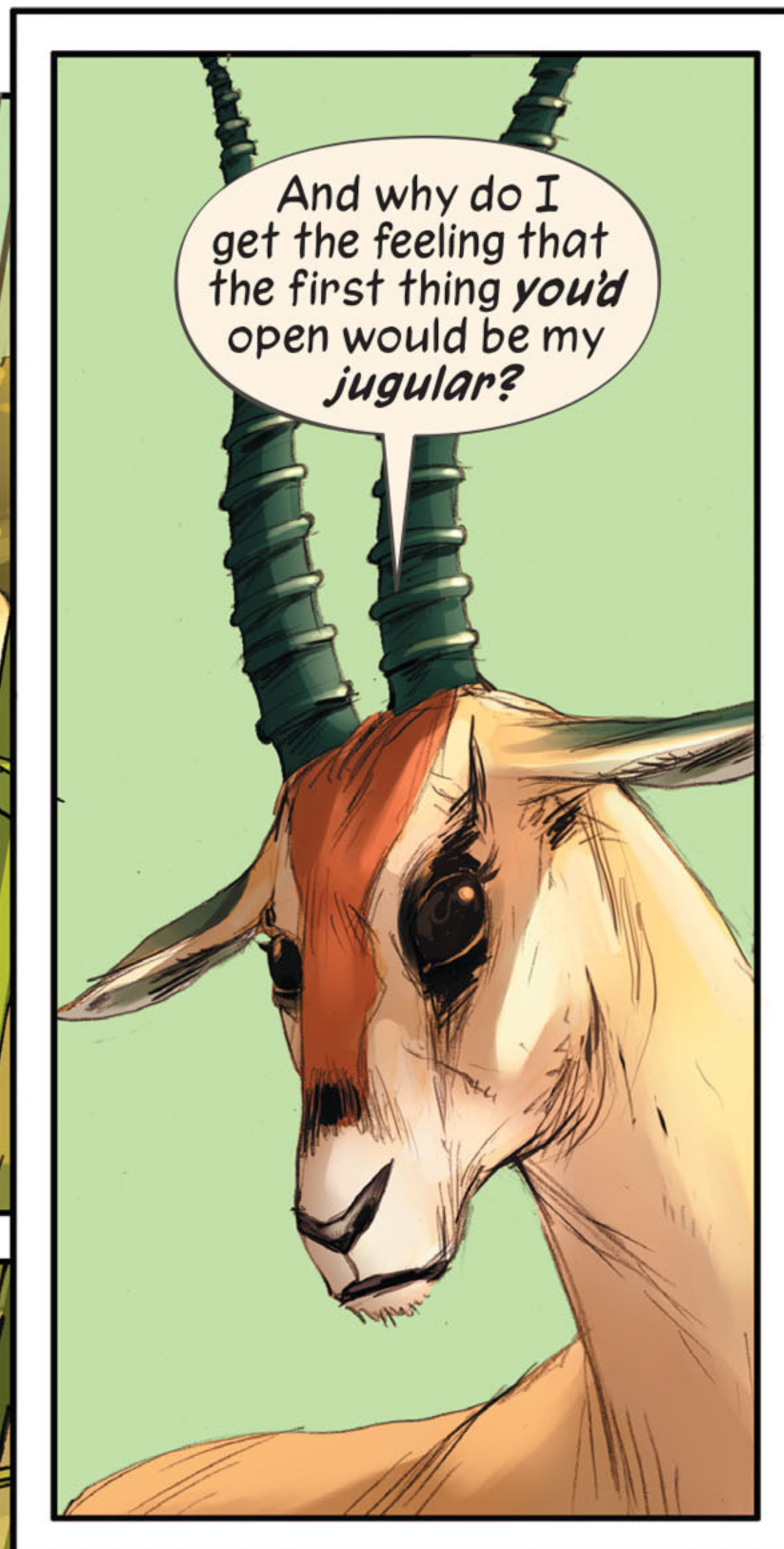
That's where the monkeys come in.



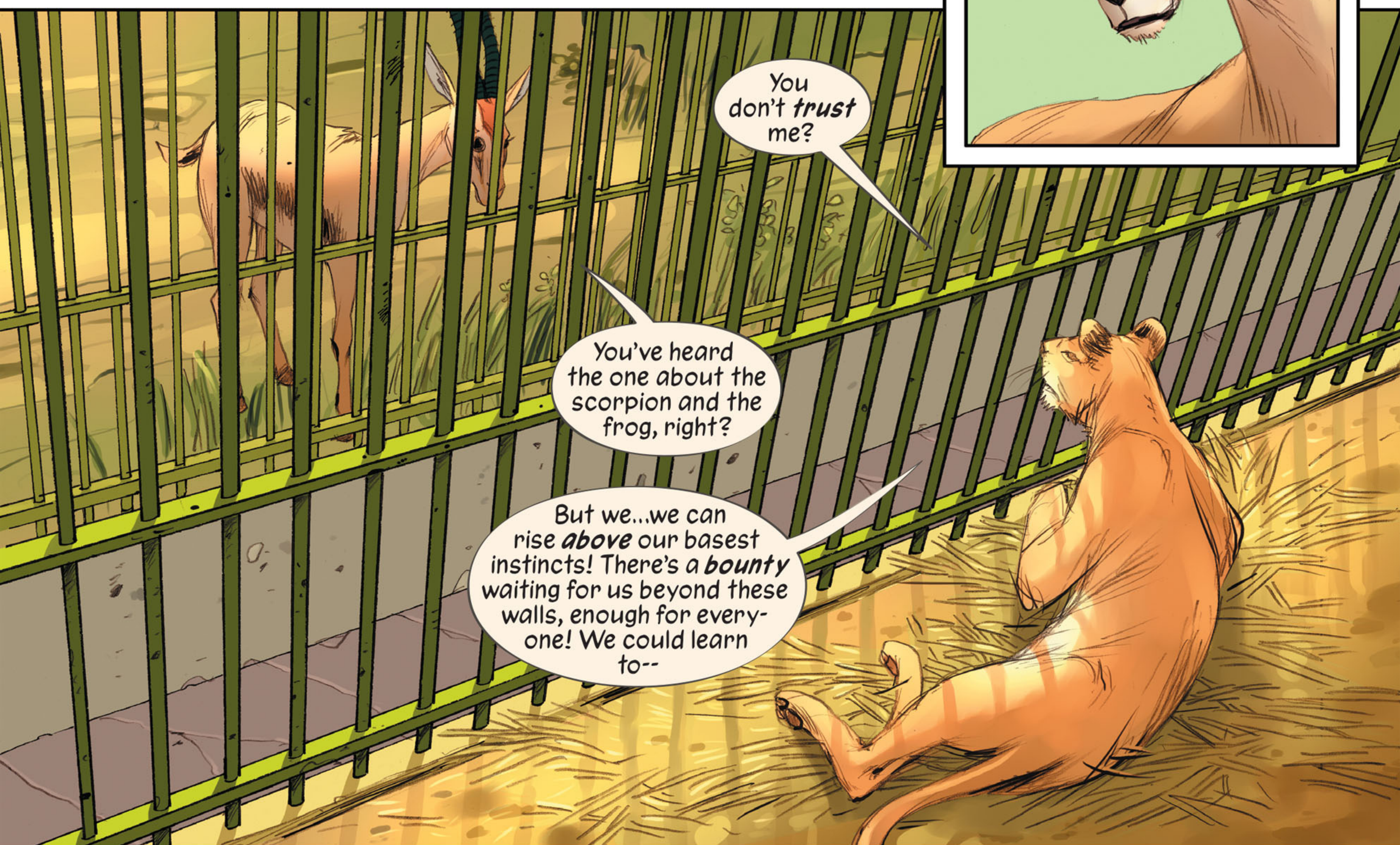
Monkeys?

You've been sitting in the sun too long, Noon.

They're already on board! I've been sending messages through the rats. They've even promised to open both *our* cages first.



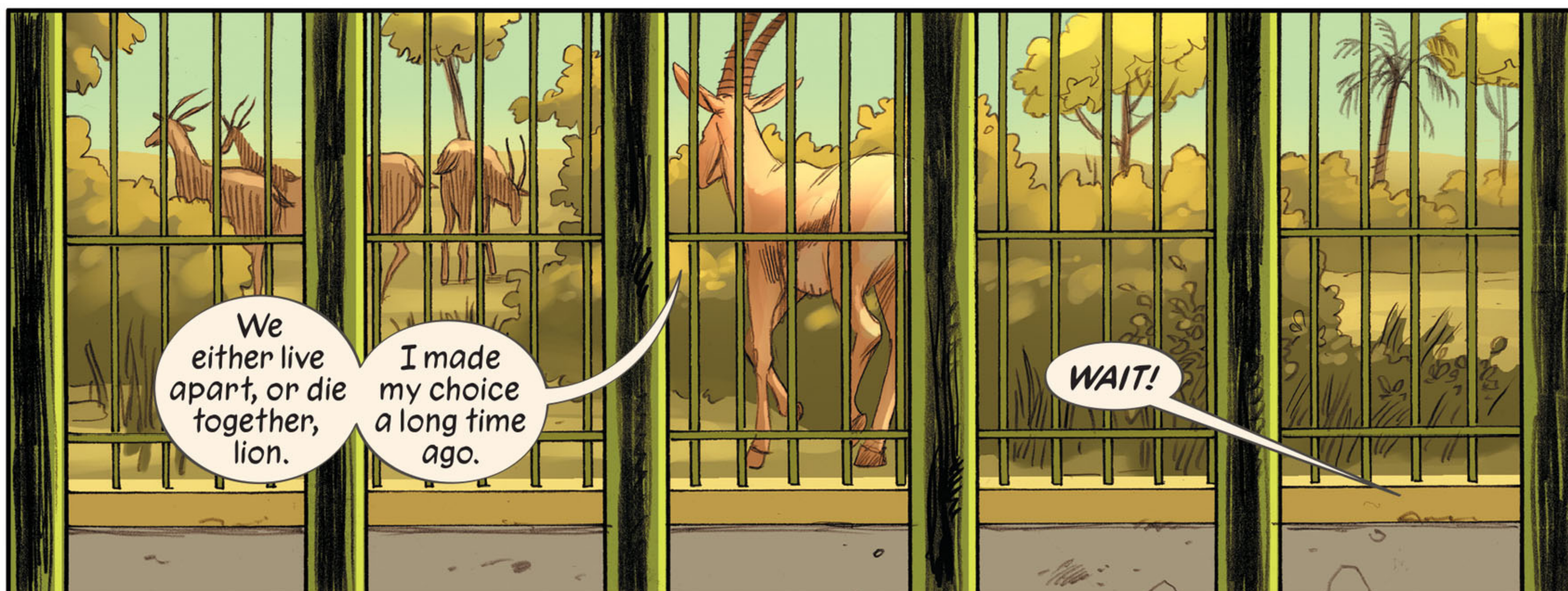
And why do I get the feeling that the first thing *you'd* open would be my *jugular*?



You don't *trust* me?

You've heard the one about the scorpion and the frog, right?

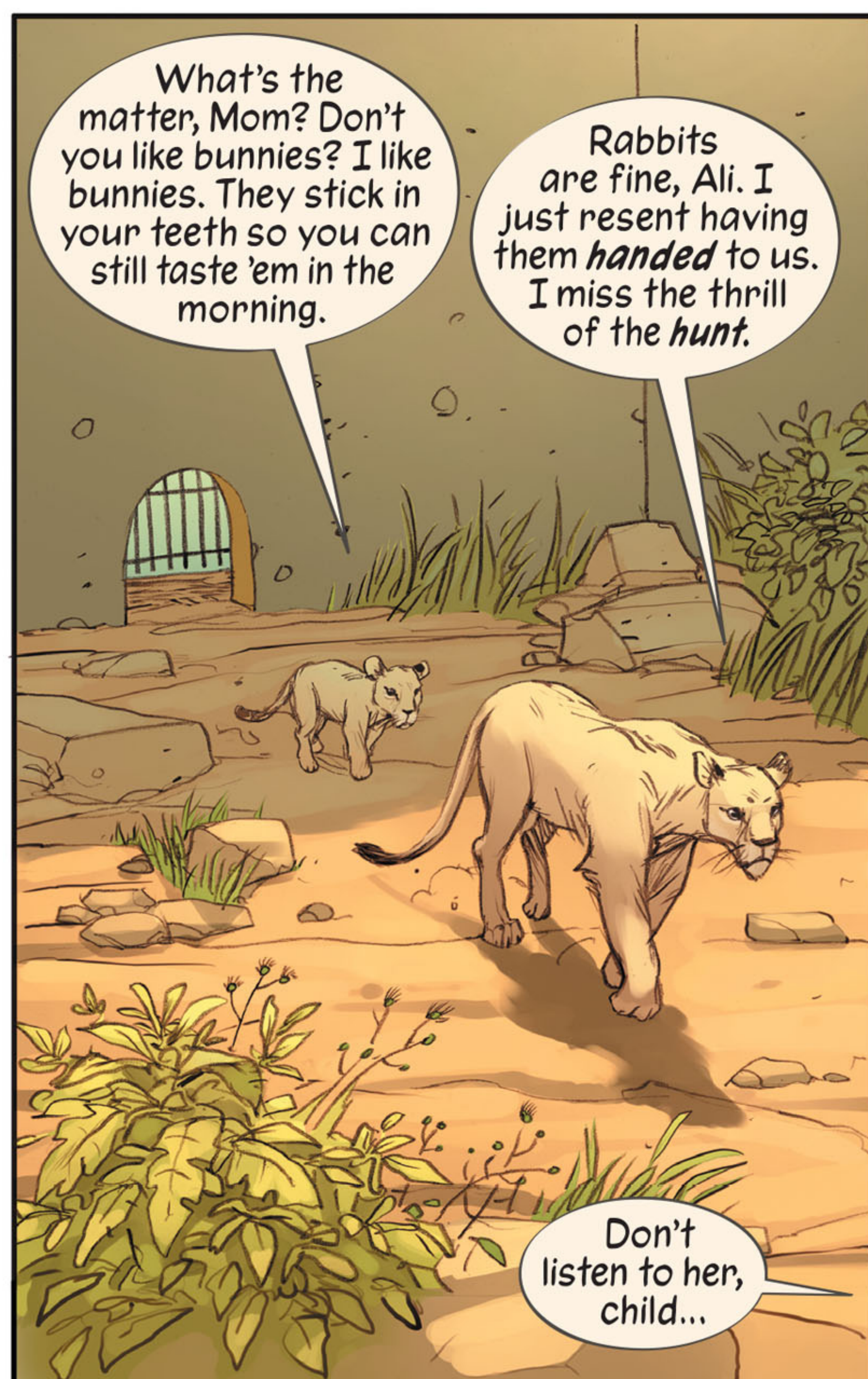
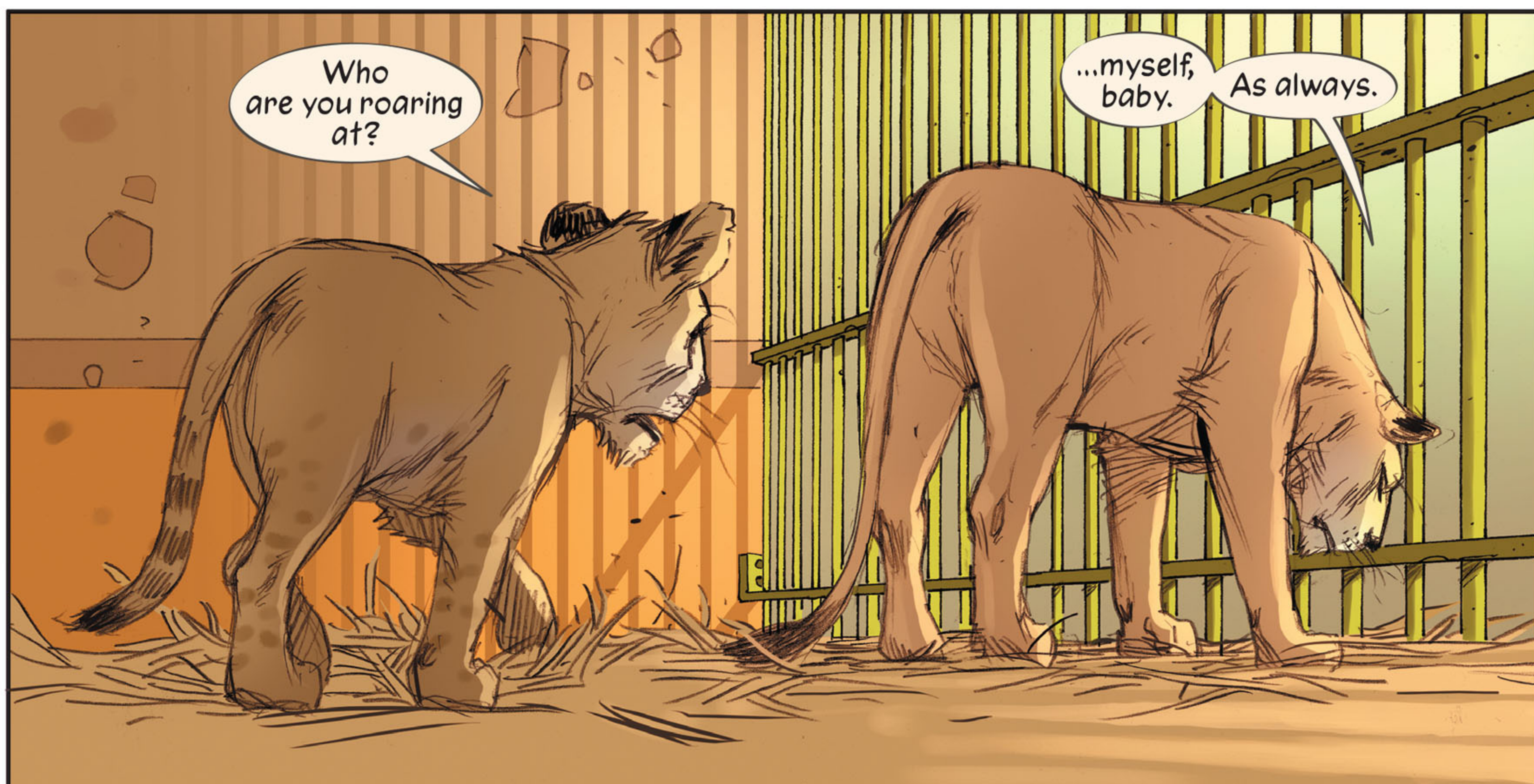
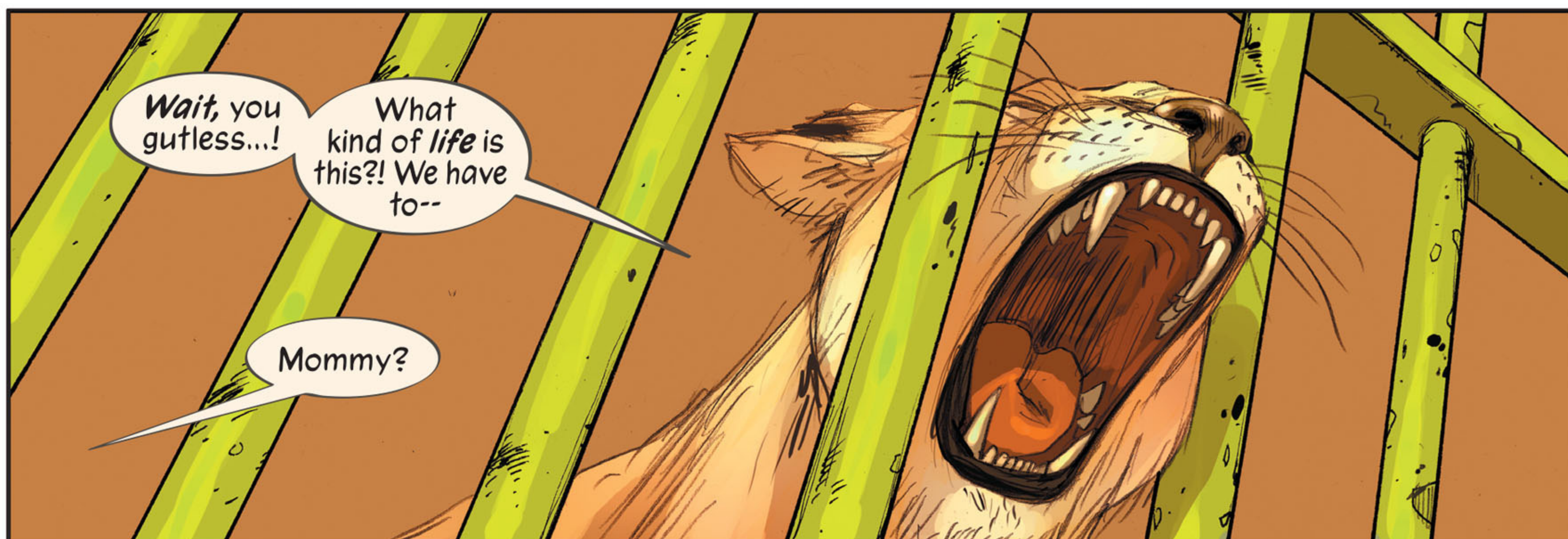
But we...we can rise *above* our basest instincts! There's a *bounty* waiting for us beyond these walls, enough for everyone! We could learn to--

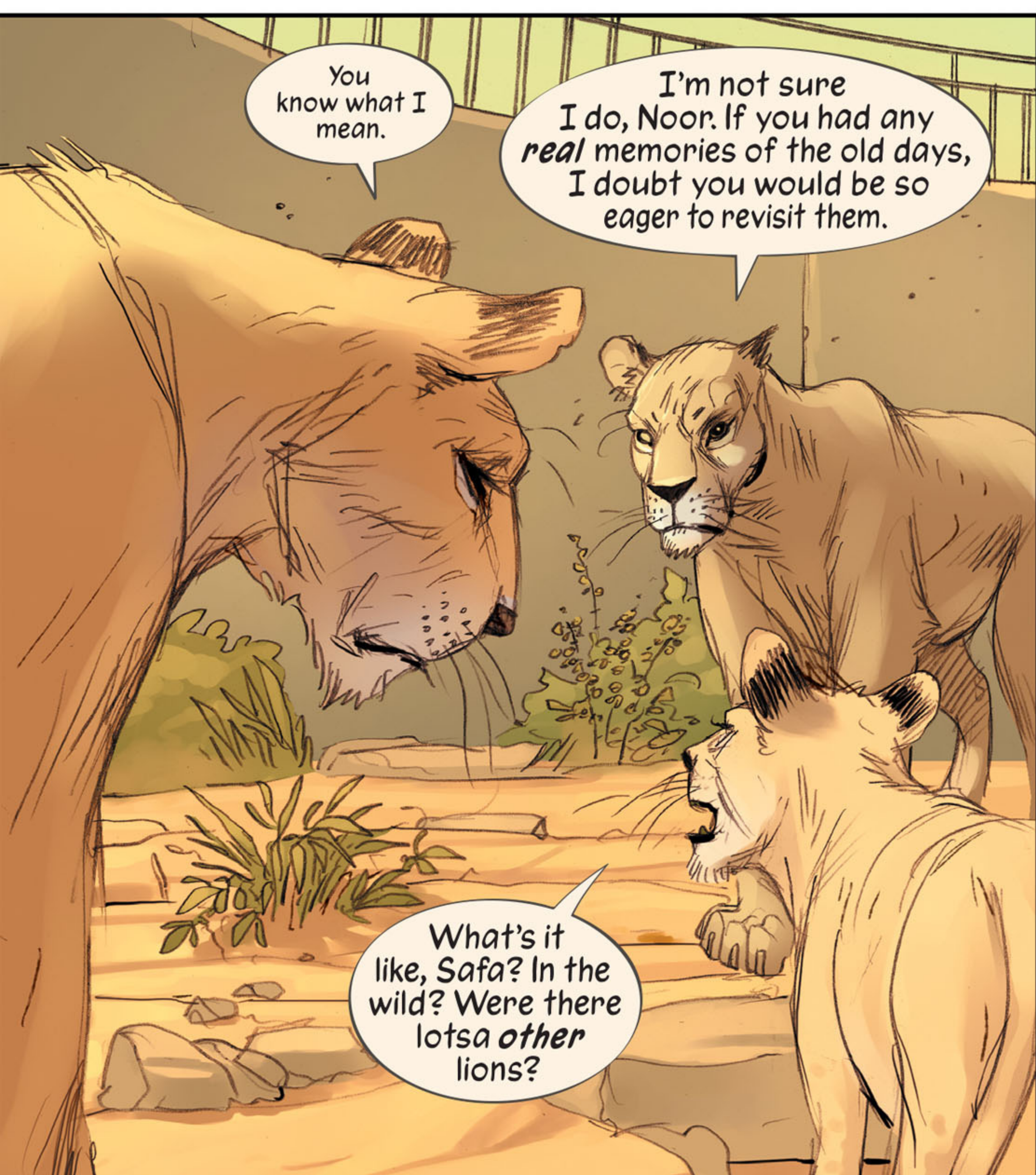
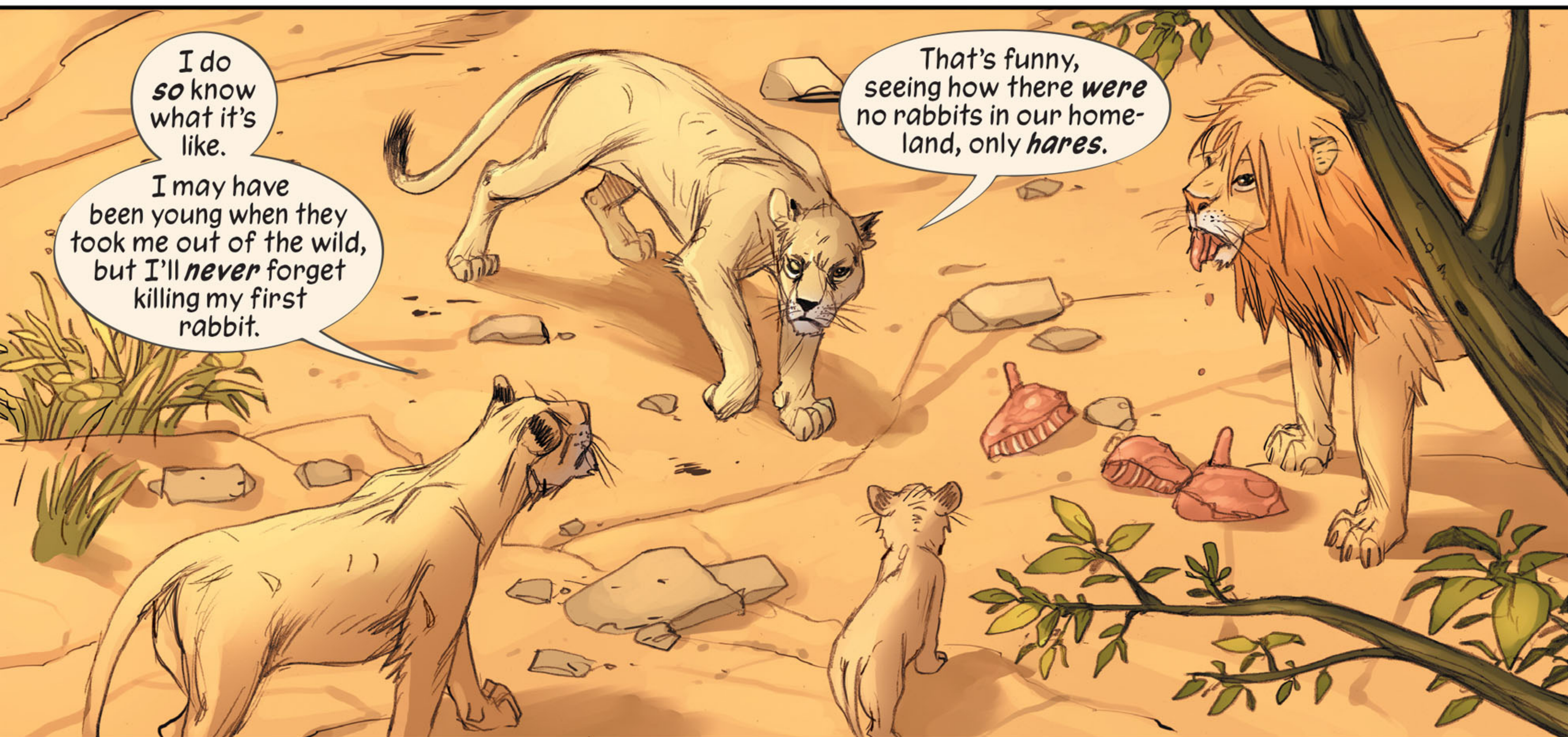
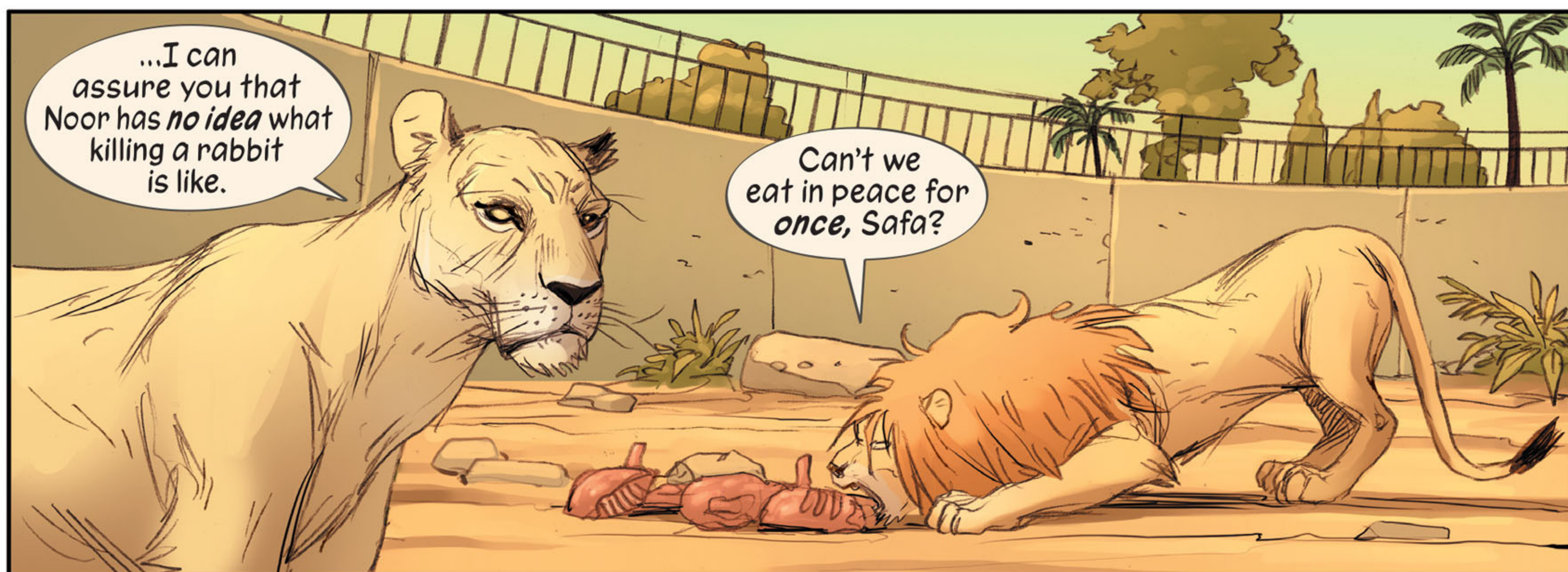


We either live apart, or die together, lion.

I made my choice a long time ago.

WAIT!







GET
AWAY FROM
ME!

Relax,
Safa.

It's only six
seconds.



Go back to
your stupid brothers,
Bukk! This isn't your
territory!

Hey,
it wasn't
marked.

Blame
whatever pathetic
gray mane is supposed
to be *protecting*
you girls.





HELP!

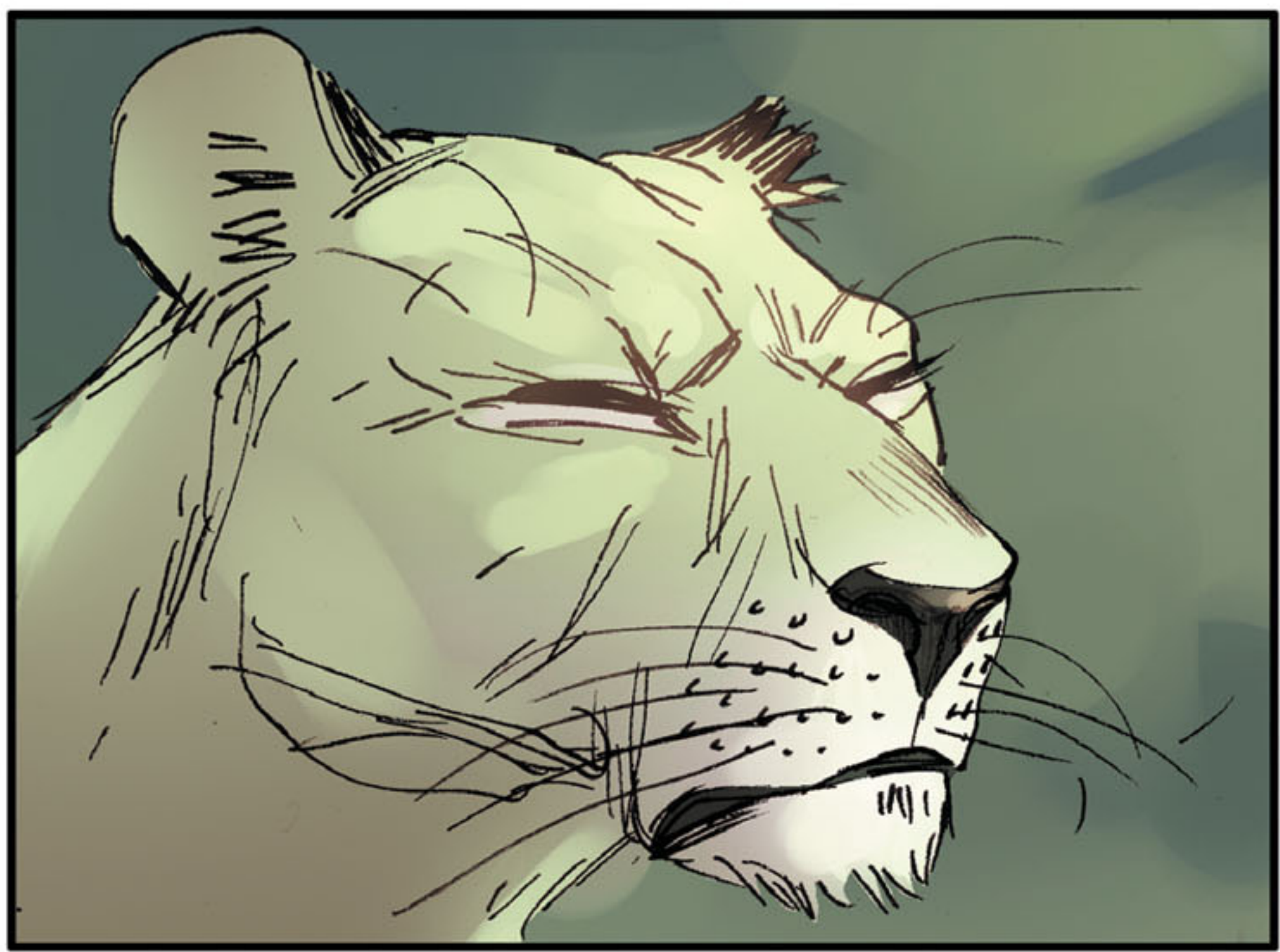
Somebody
HEL--

QUIET.

AAAH!!

Keep
fighting, and
I'll take one of
your *ears*,
too.



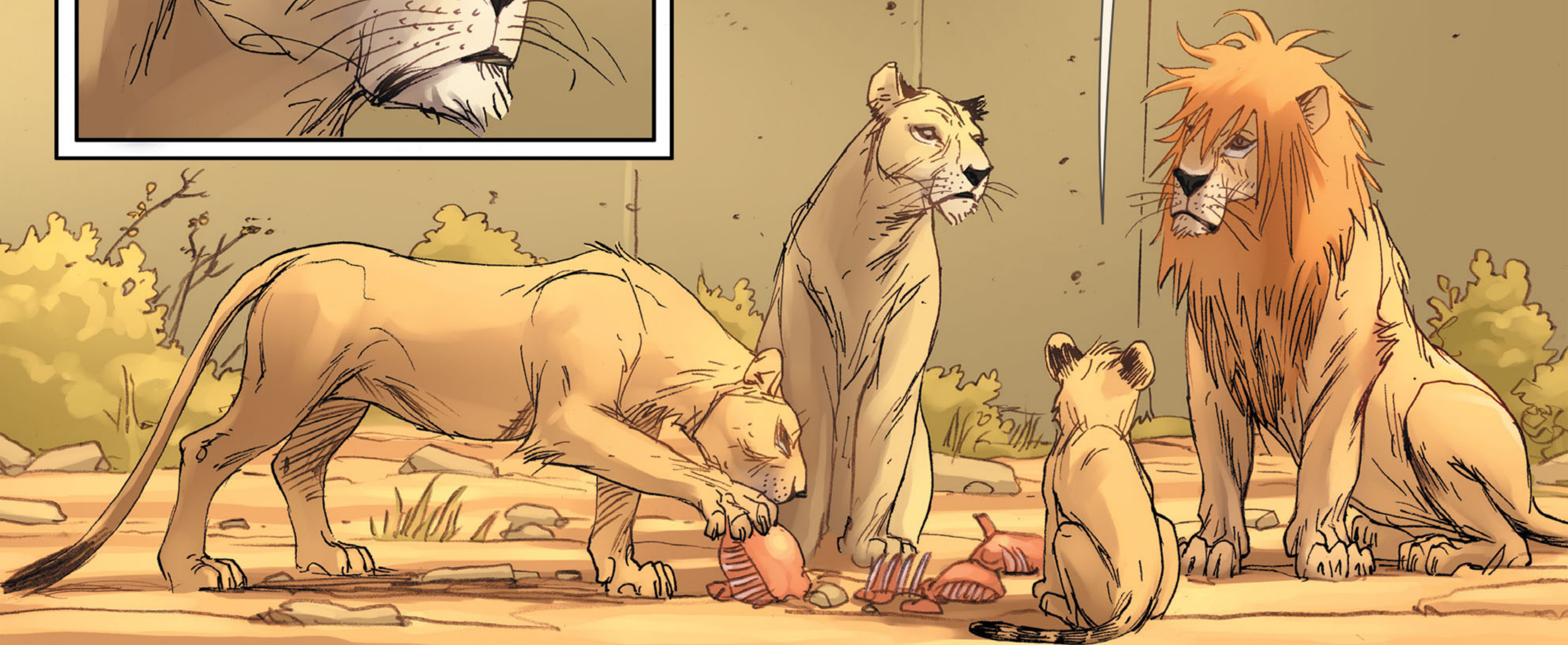


There were...flies, Ali.

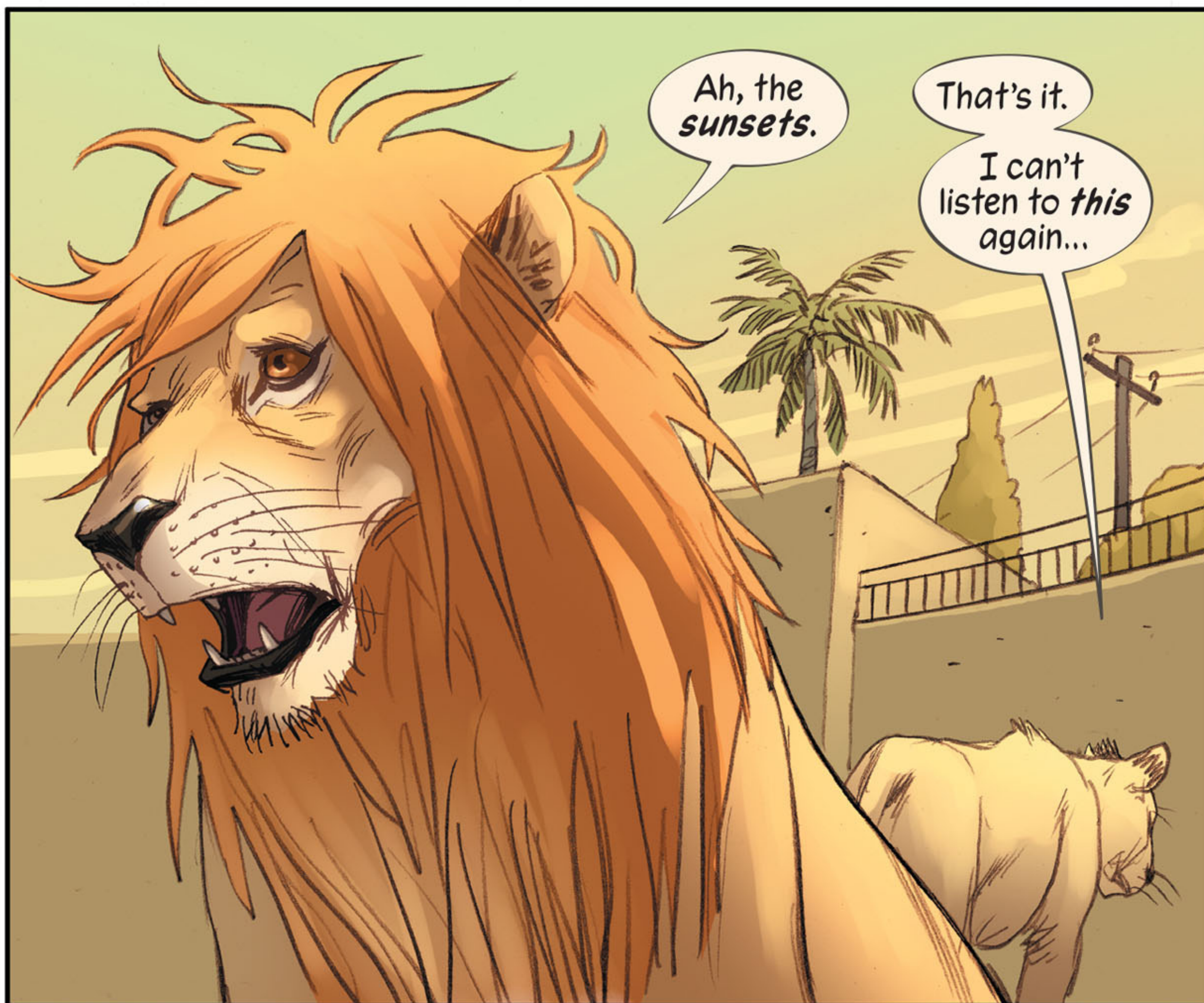
Black, bloodsucking flies. Worse than anything we have here. You should count your blessings that this is the only life you've ever known.

Is that for true, Zill?

Well, I lived in a different area than Sifa and your mother, so my experiences were probably--



Tell him about the sunsets, Zill!



Ah, the sunsets.

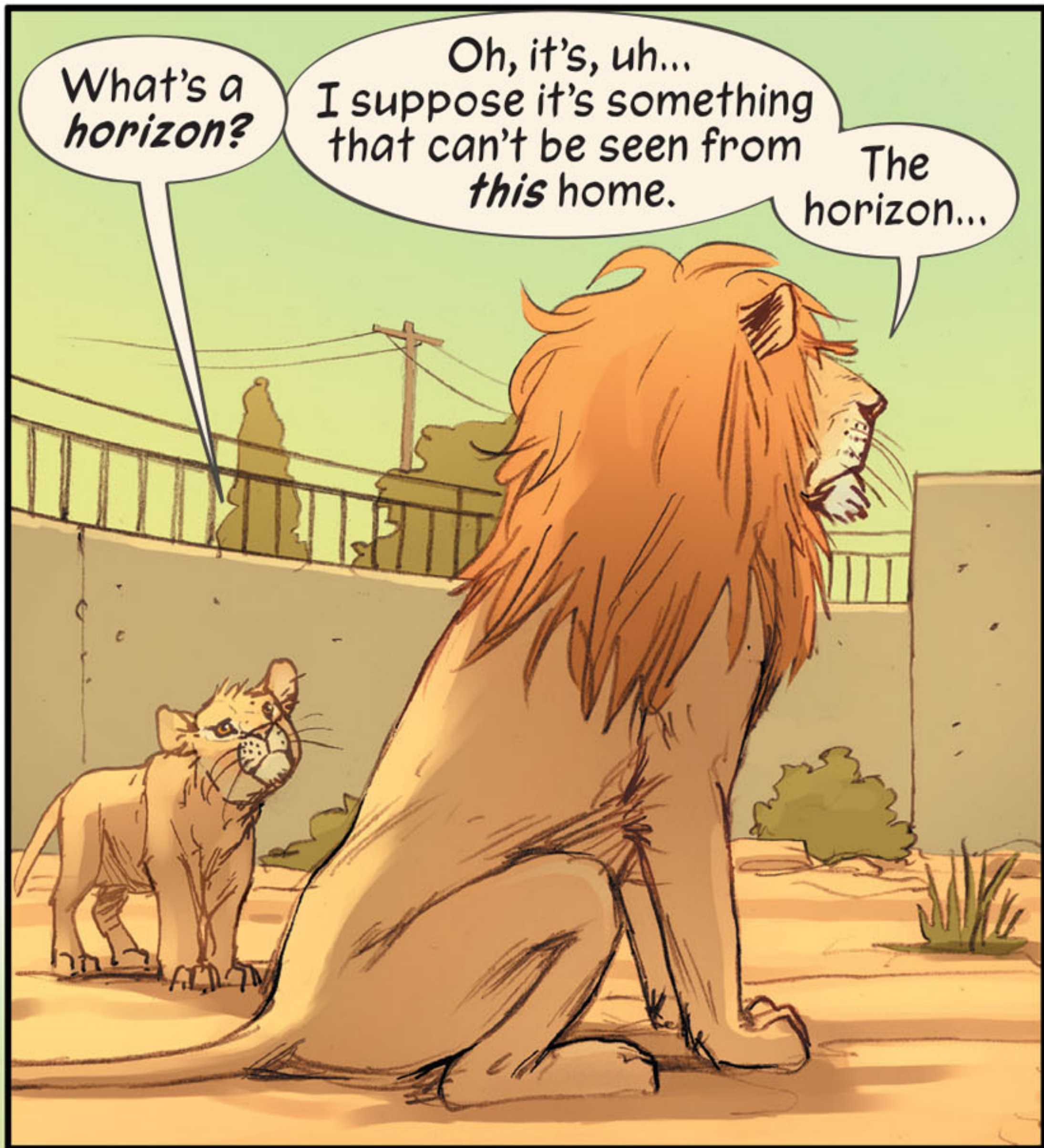
That's it.

I can't listen to *this* again...



My first pride lived next to a small hill, and in the evenings, I would go to the very top of it.

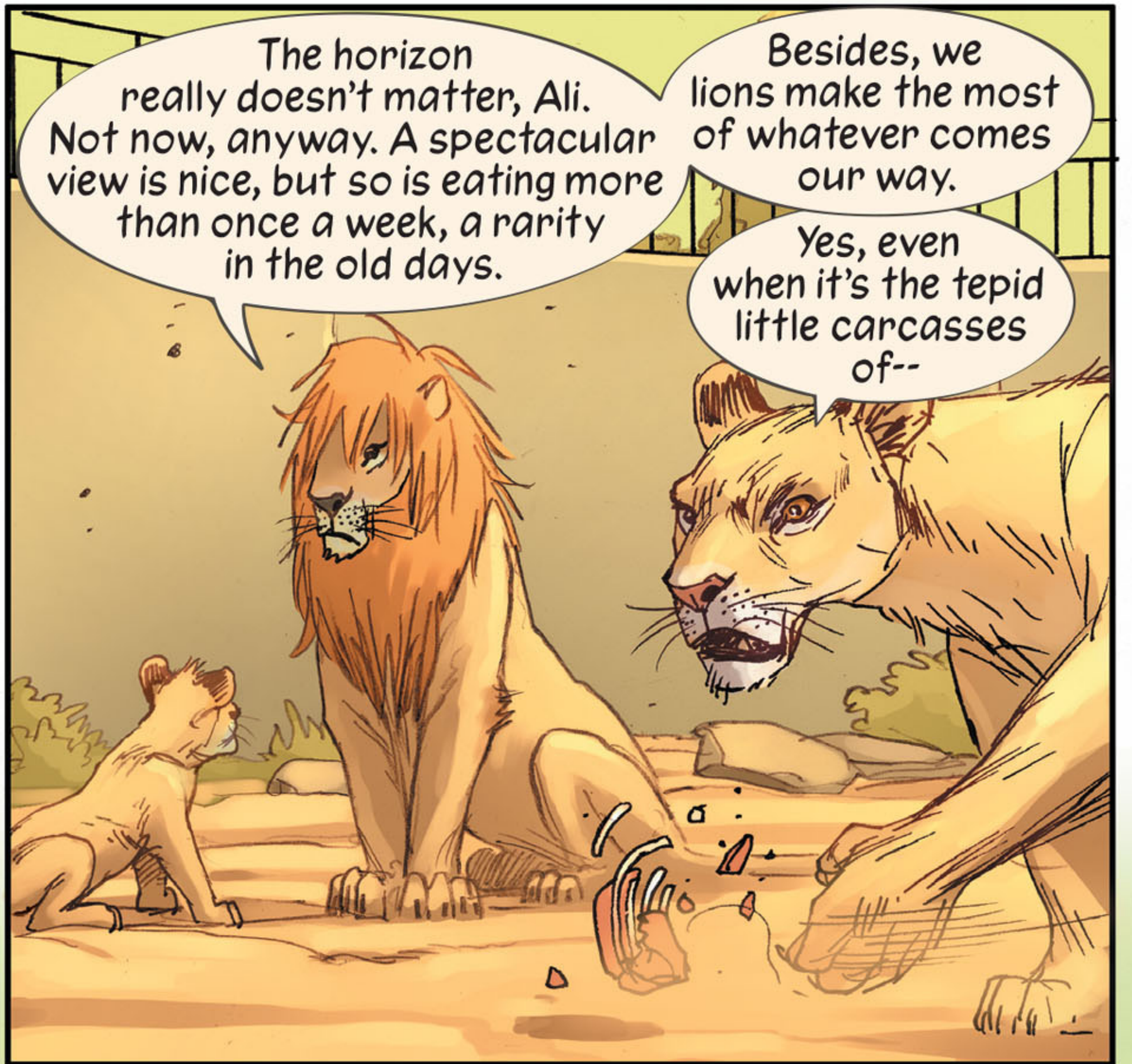
At the end of every day, I watched as the horizon *devoured* the sun in slow, steady bites, spilling its blood across the azure sky.



What's a *horizon*?

Oh, it's, uh... I suppose it's something that can't be seen from *this* home.

The horizon...



The horizon really doesn't matter, Ali. Not now, anyway. A spectacular view is nice, but so is eating more than once a week, a rarity in the old days.

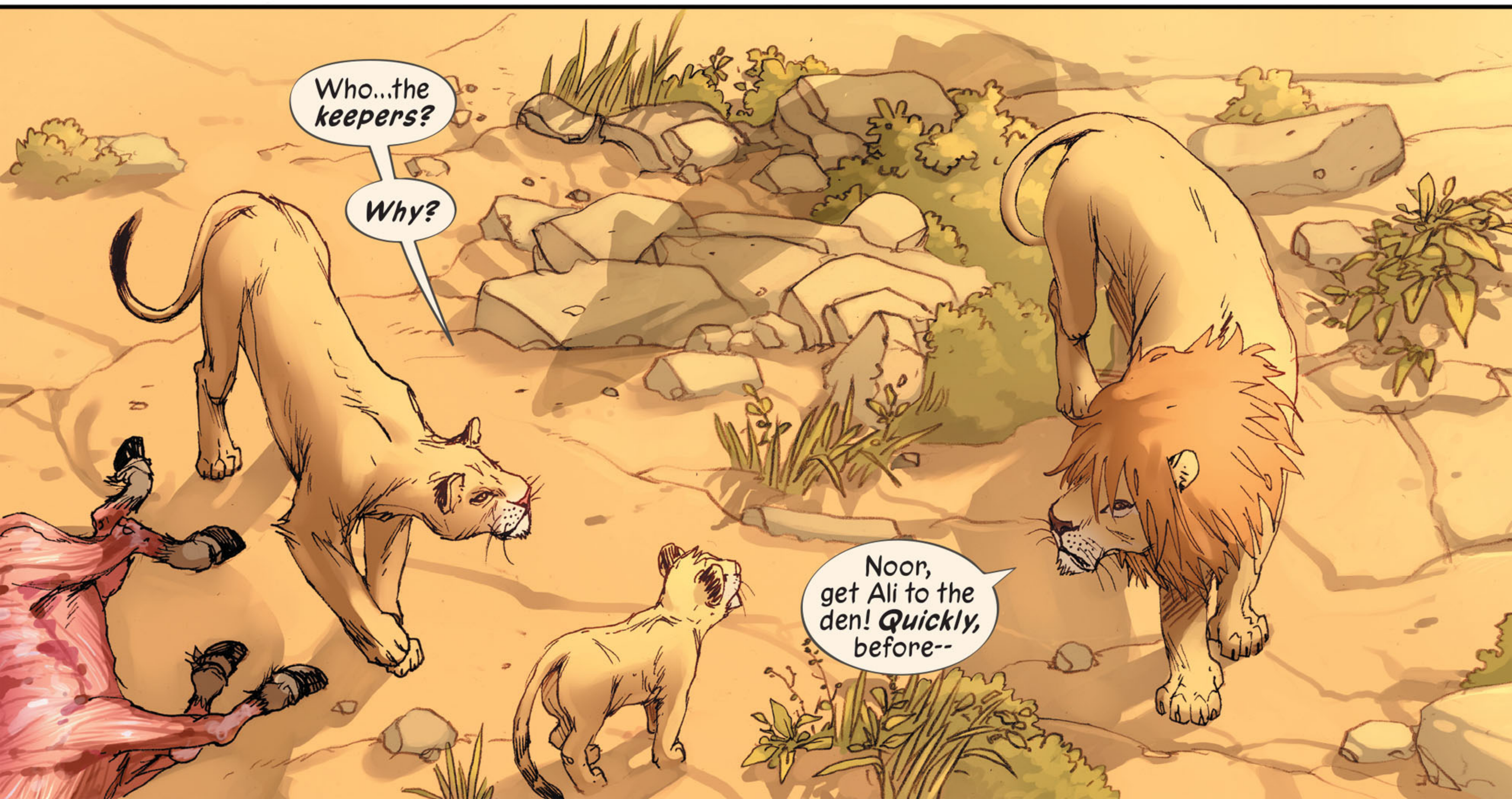
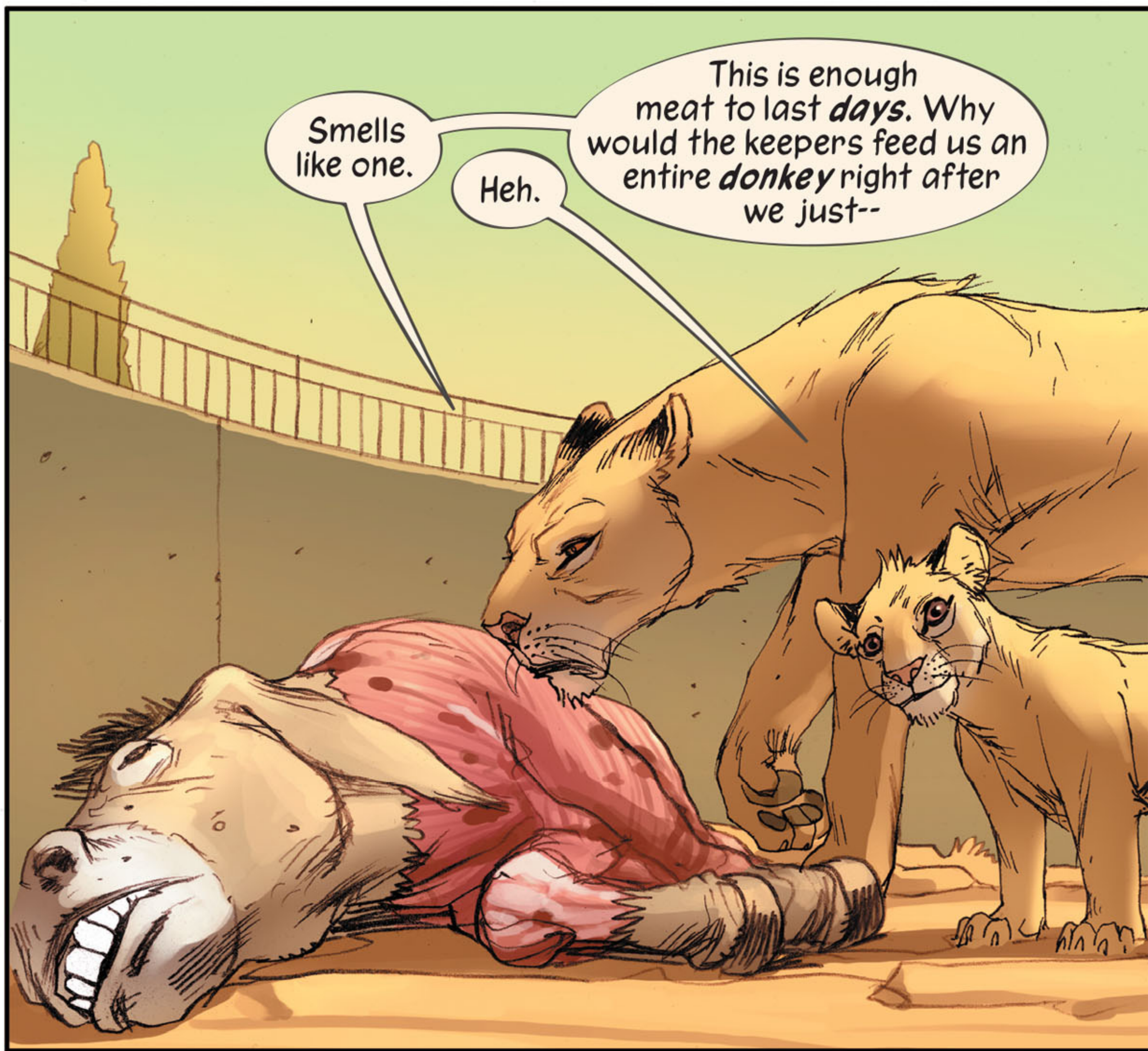
Besides, we lions make the most of whatever comes our way.

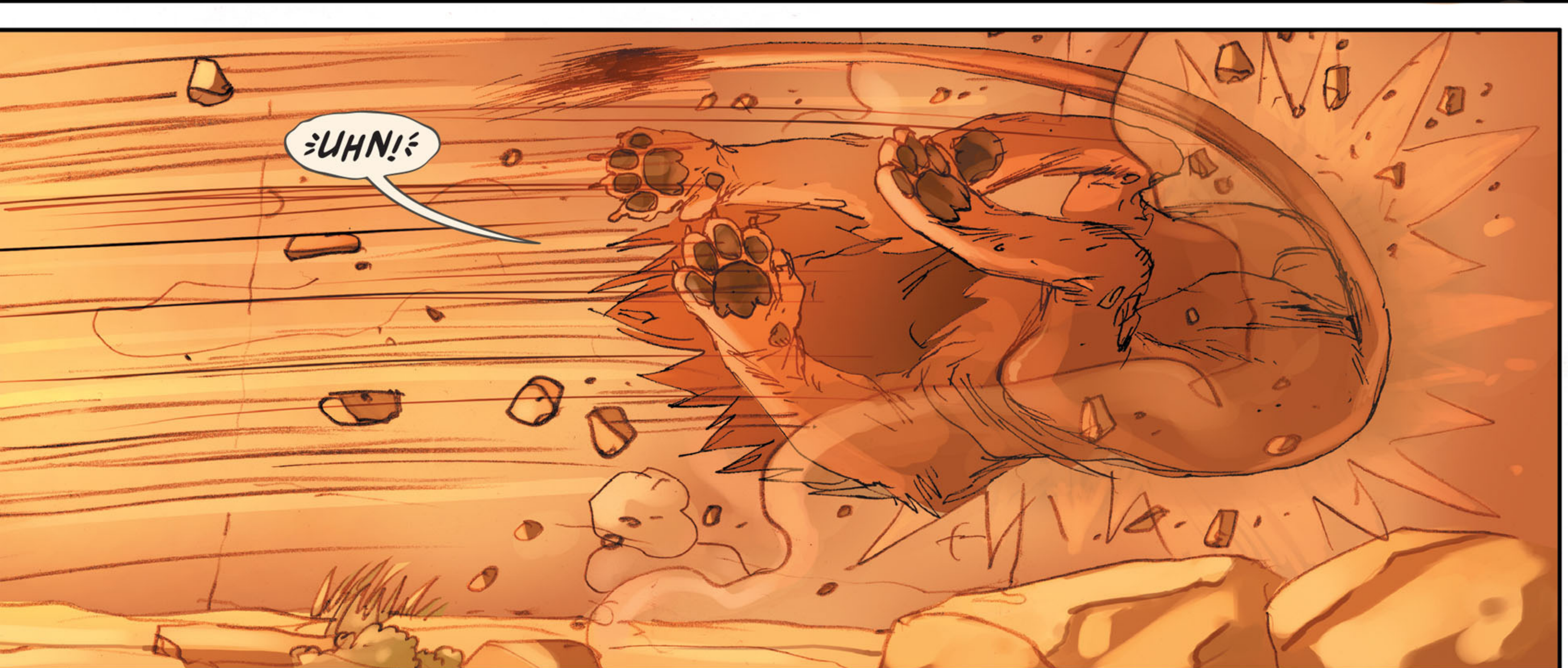
Yes, even when it's the tepid little carcasses of--

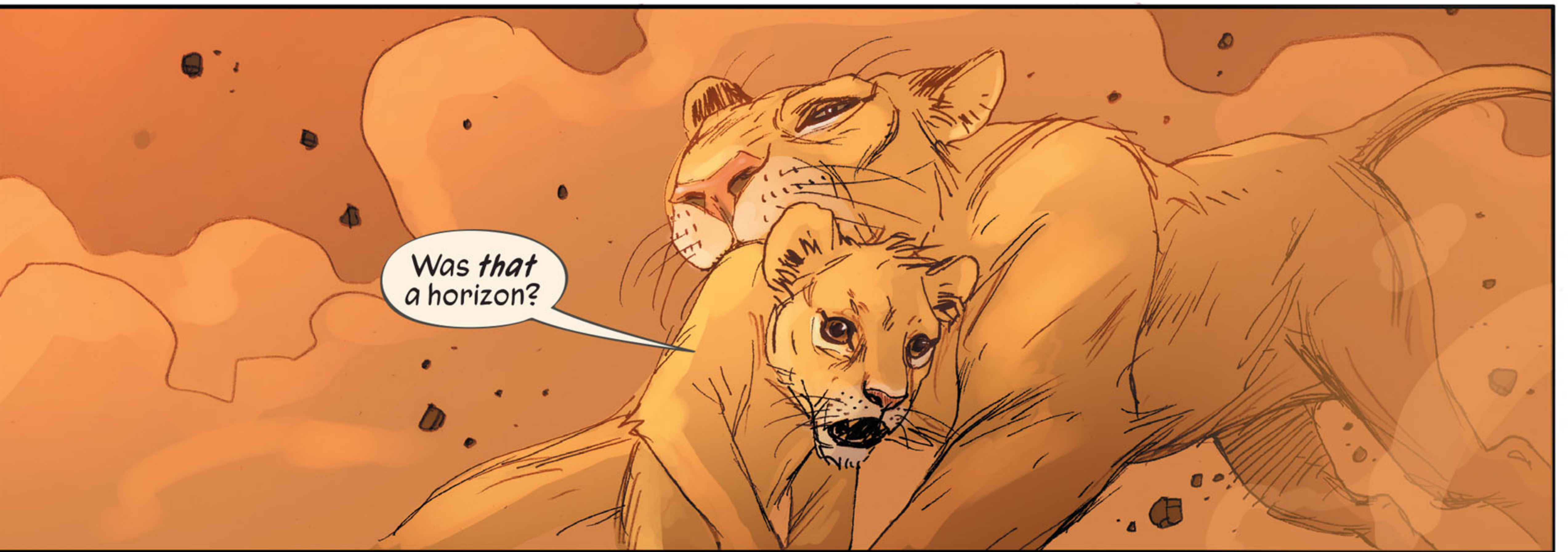
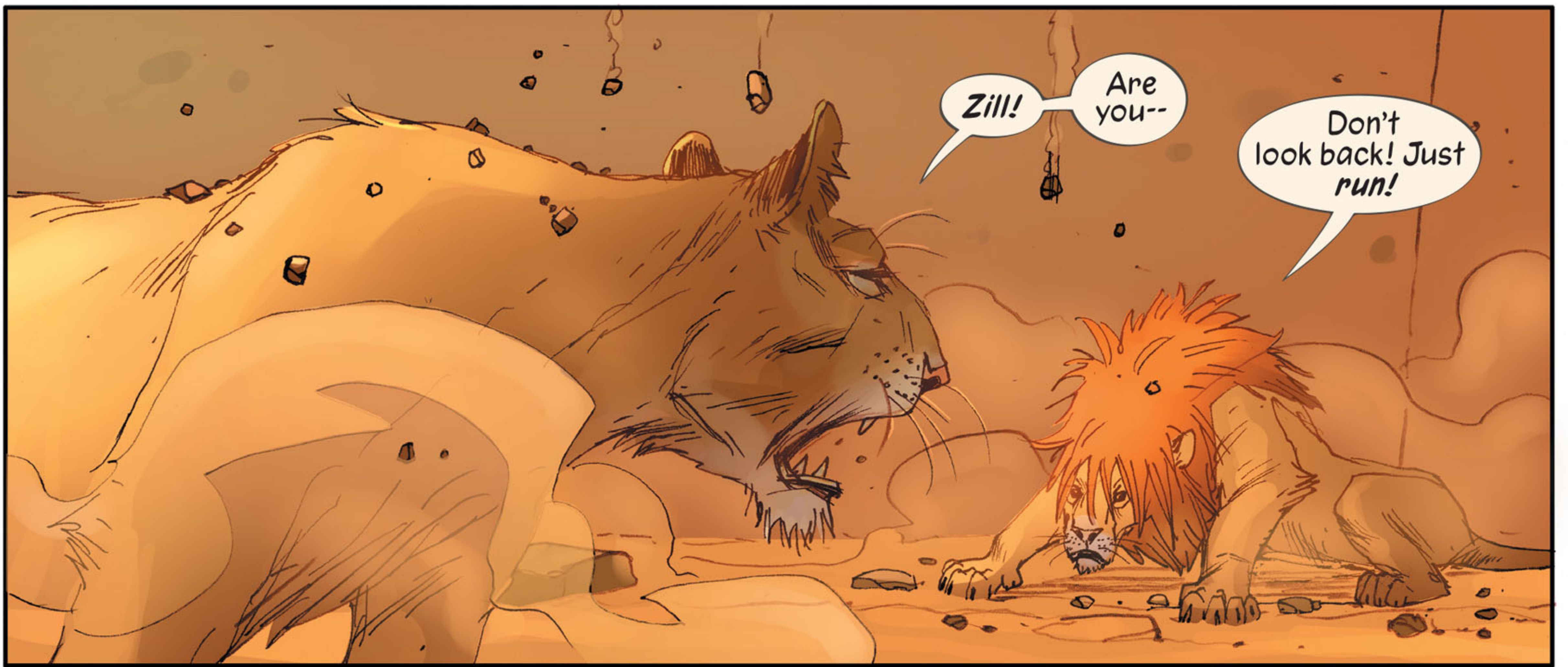


GAH!

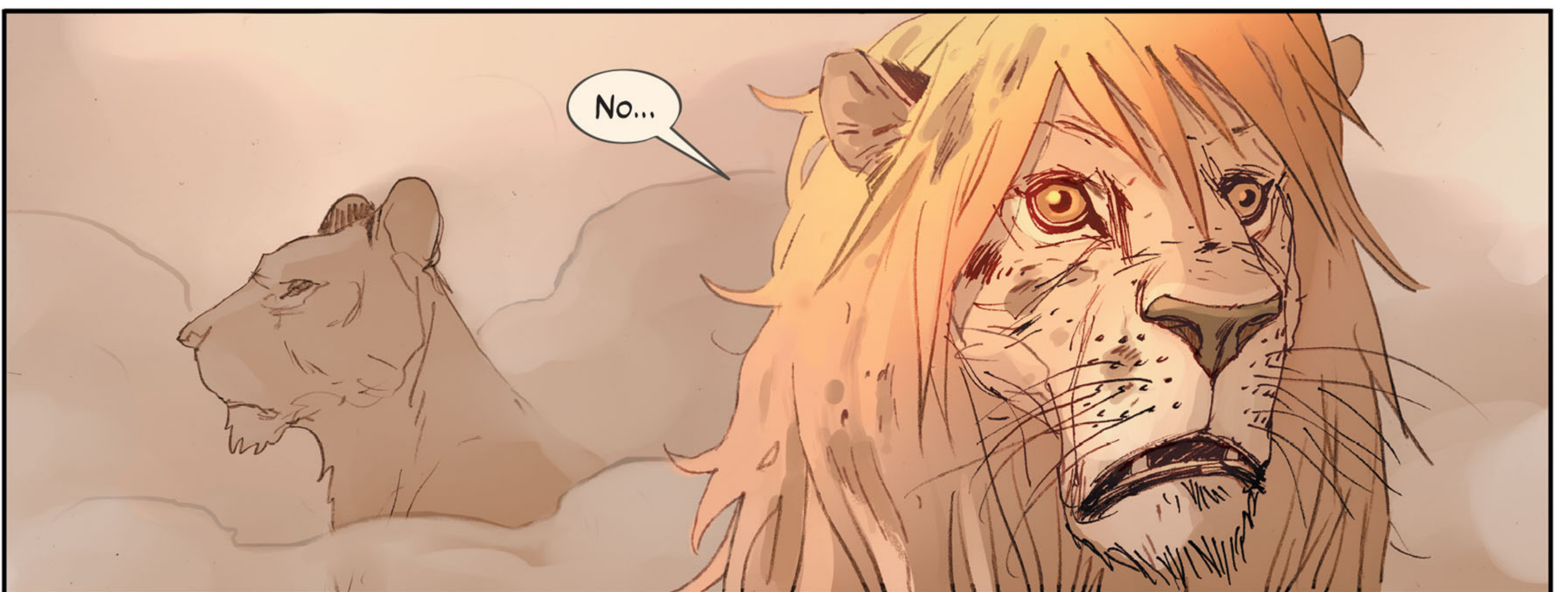
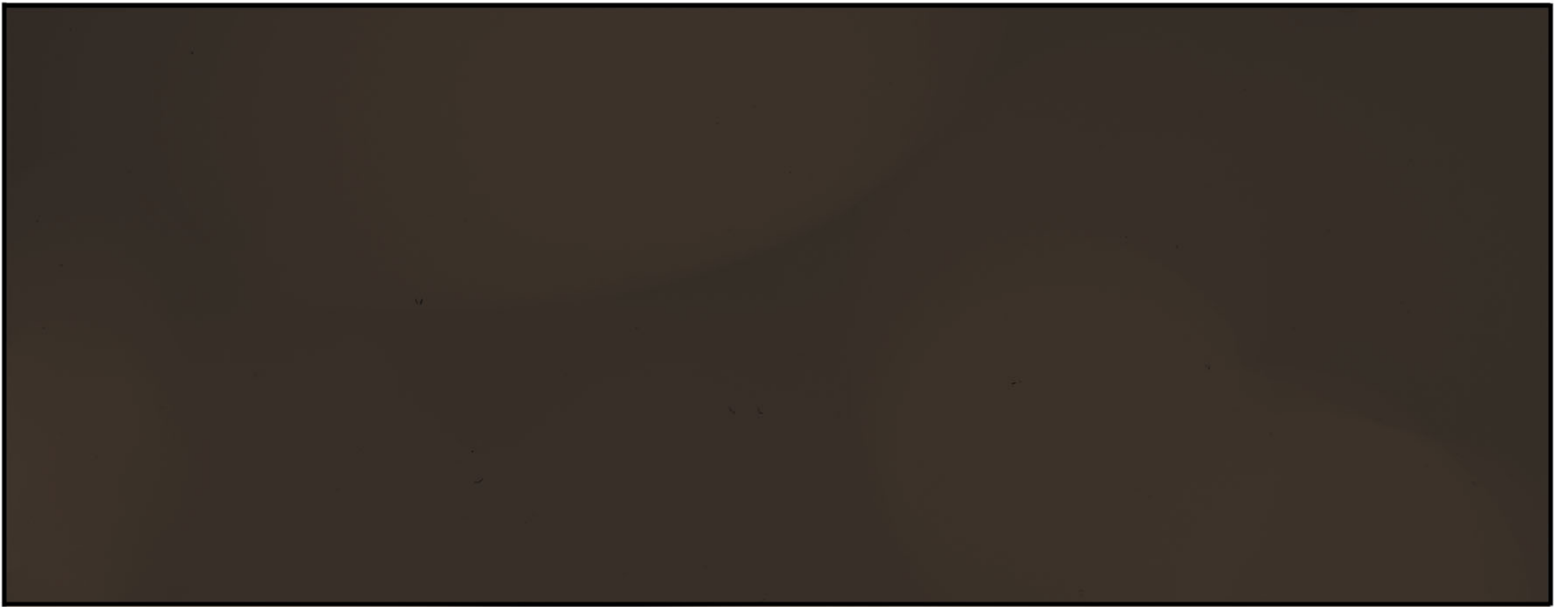
HHUMPH













...we're free.



This isn't right.

What is *that* supposed to mean, Noor? I thought this was all you ever wanted.

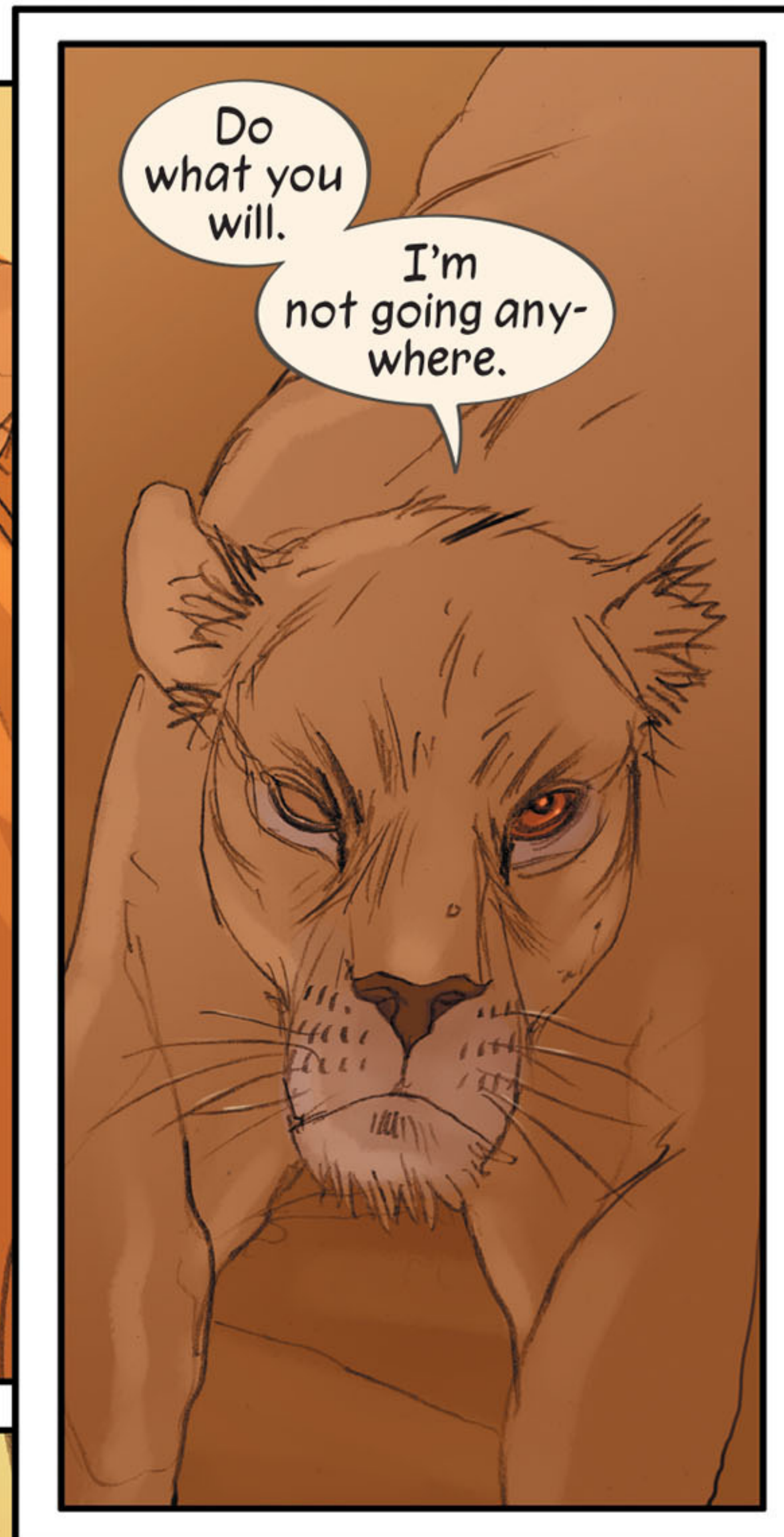




Perhaps... perhaps you're *right*.

Whatever, this isn't over yet.

Grab the cub's scruff, and let's make tracks.



Do what you will.

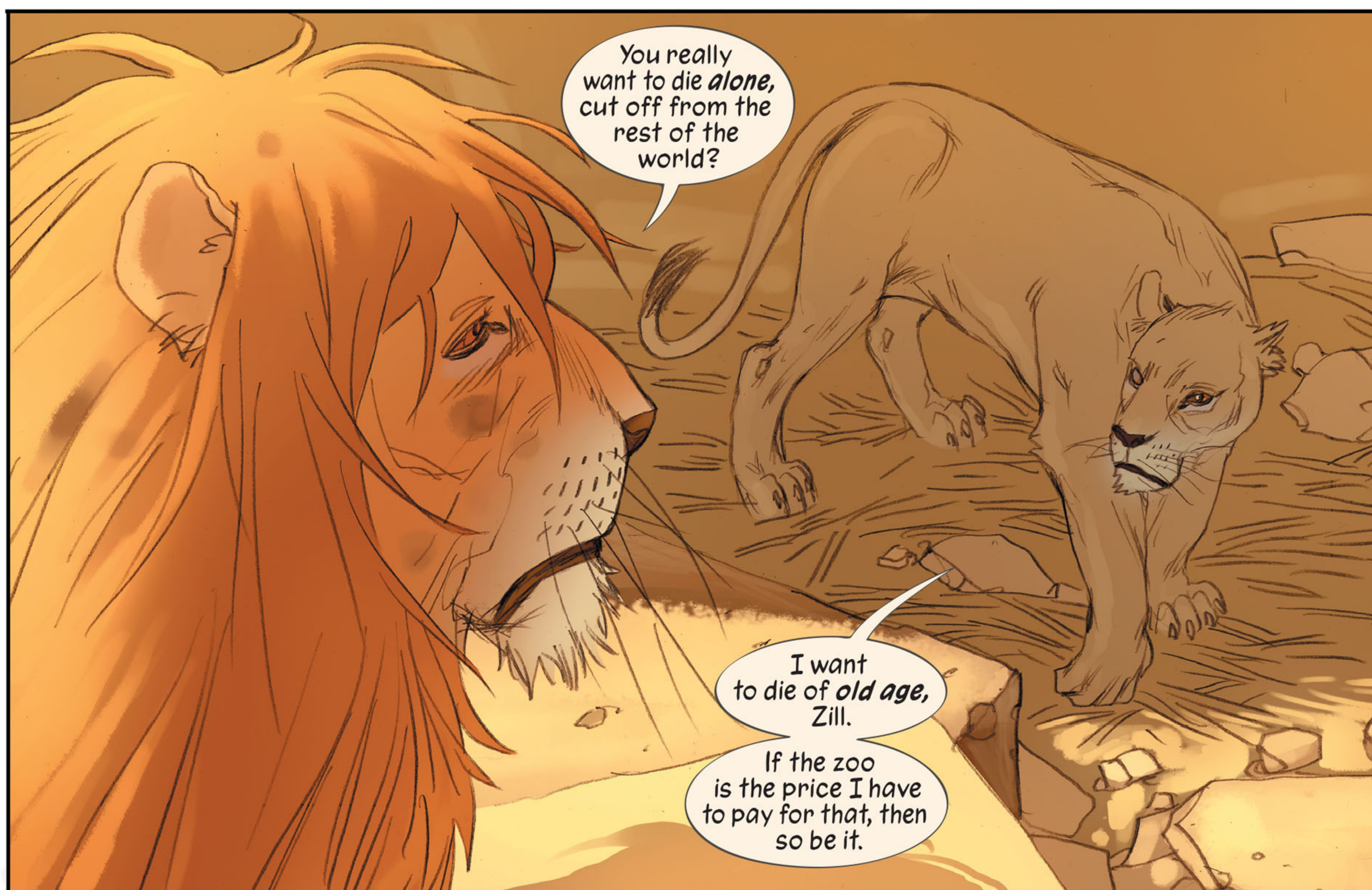
I'm not going anywhere.



But you *gotta*, Safa! Mom says it's a jungle out there. We're gonna be kings!

Then enjoy your reign in Hell.

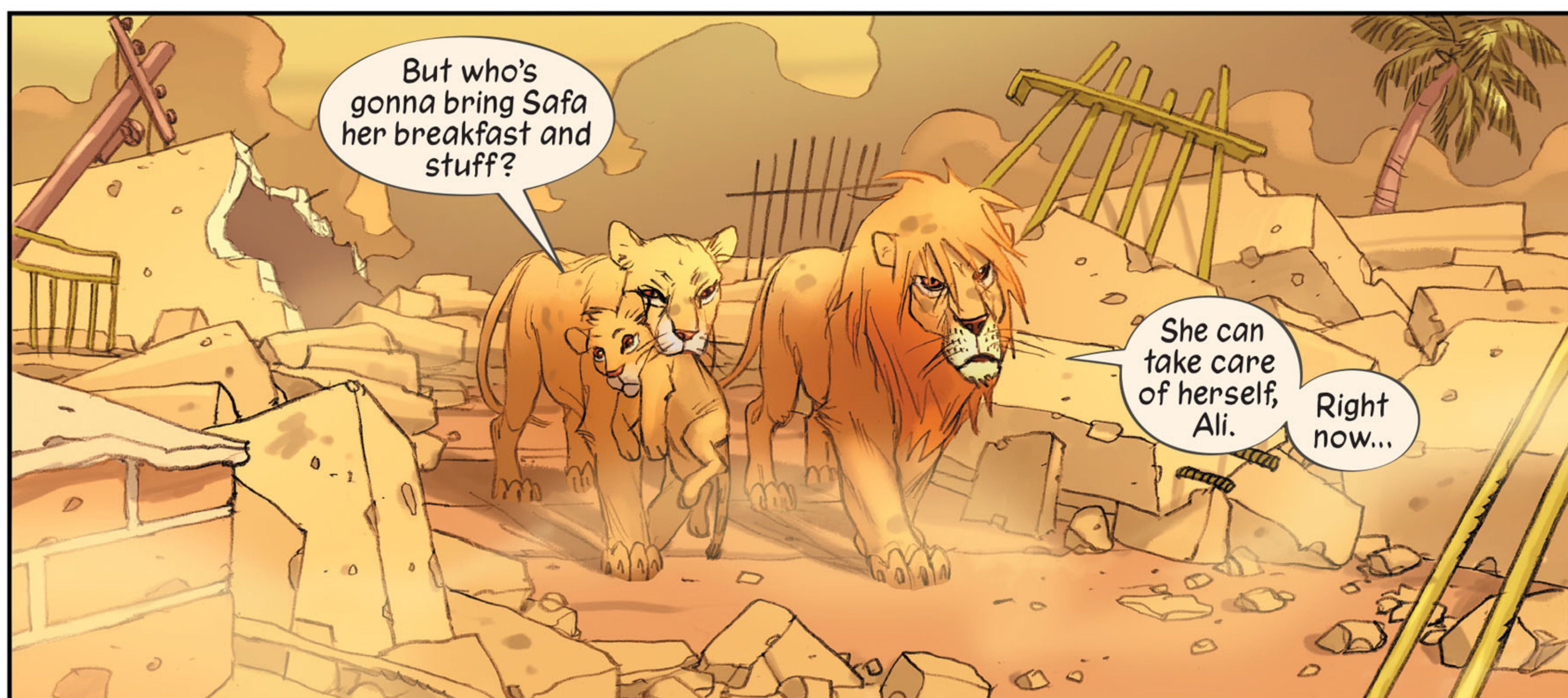
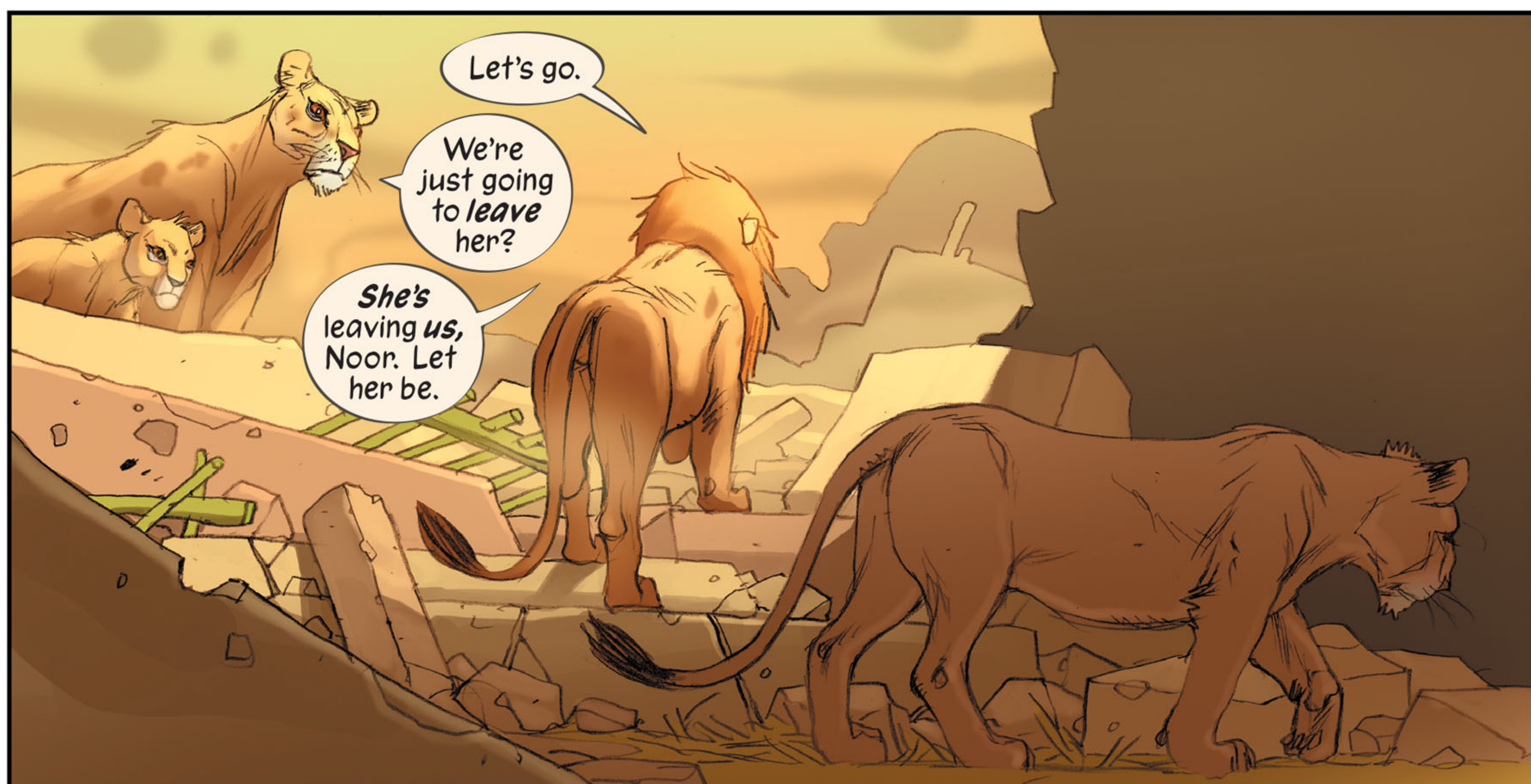
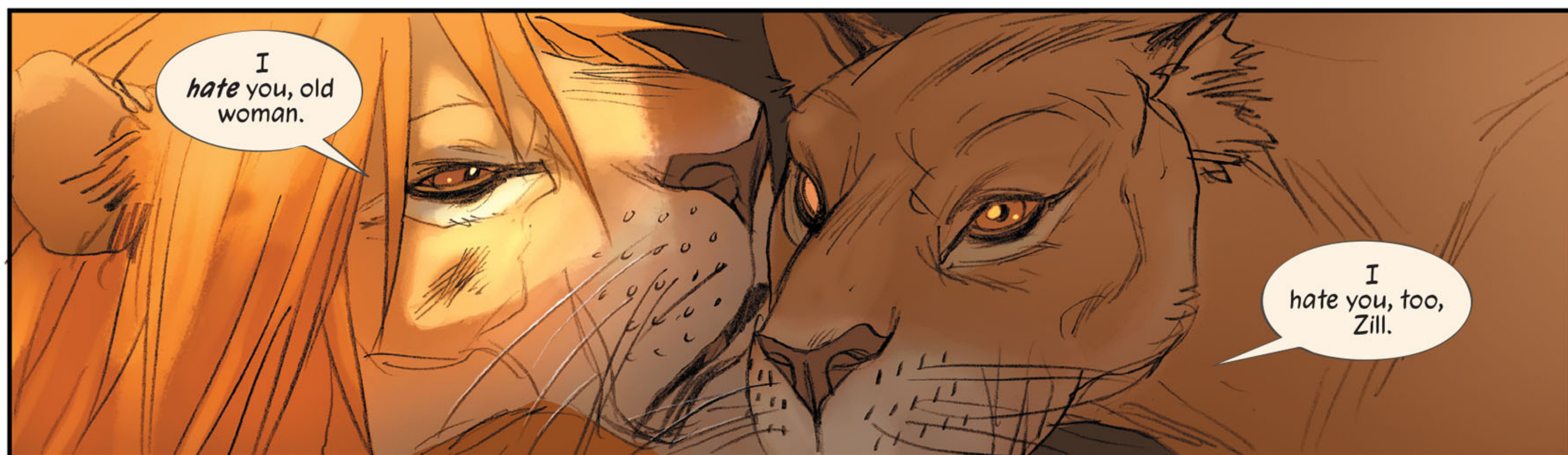
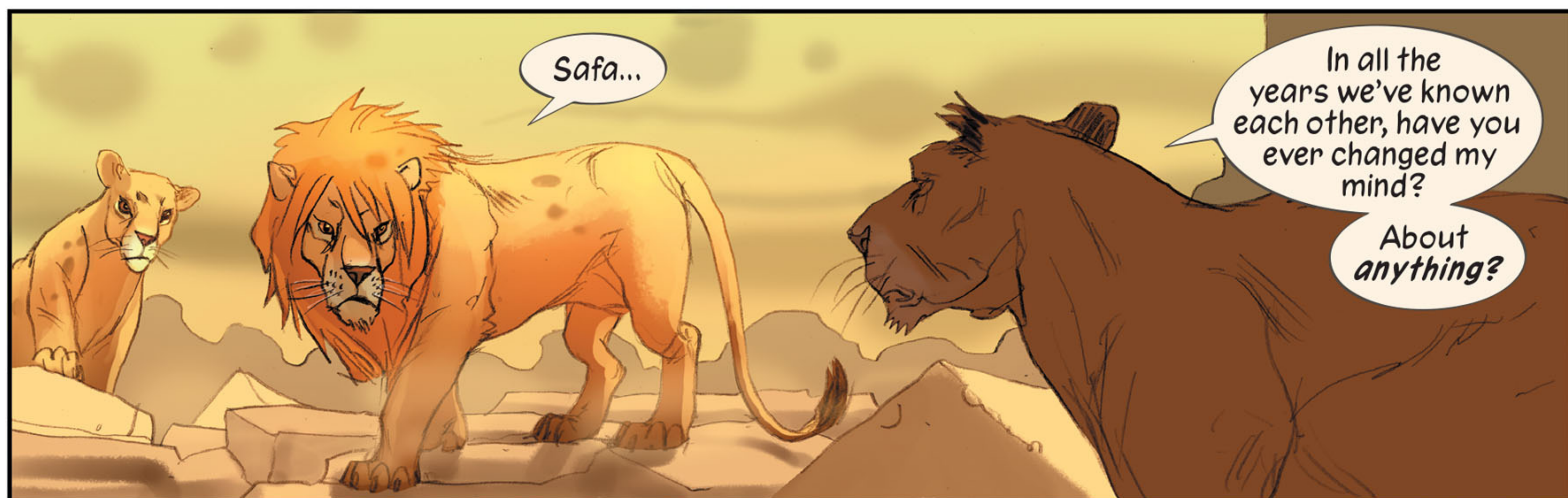
This place might not be perfect, but it's better than the alternative.

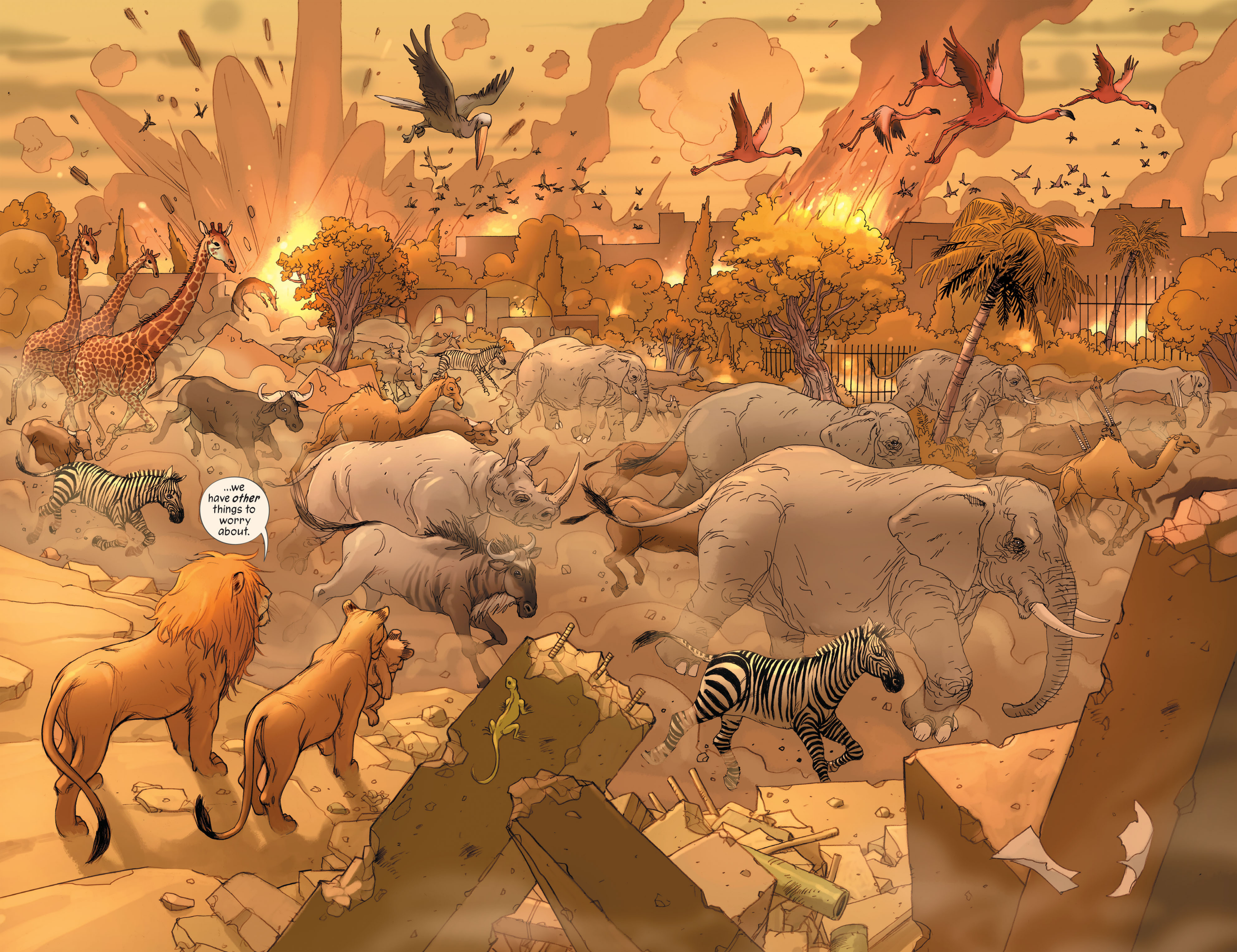


You really want to die *alone*, cut off from the rest of the world?

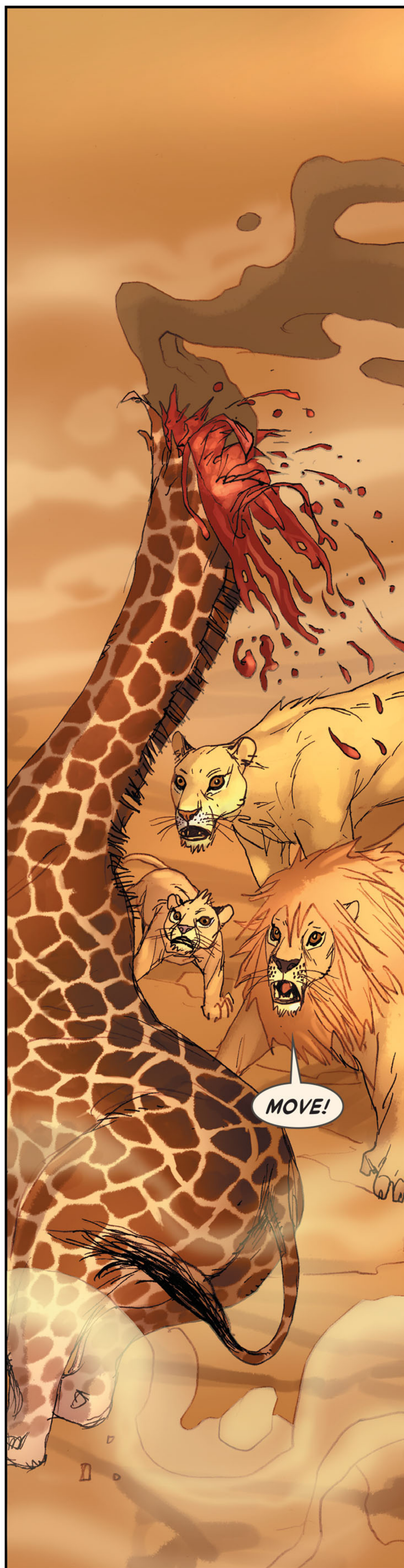
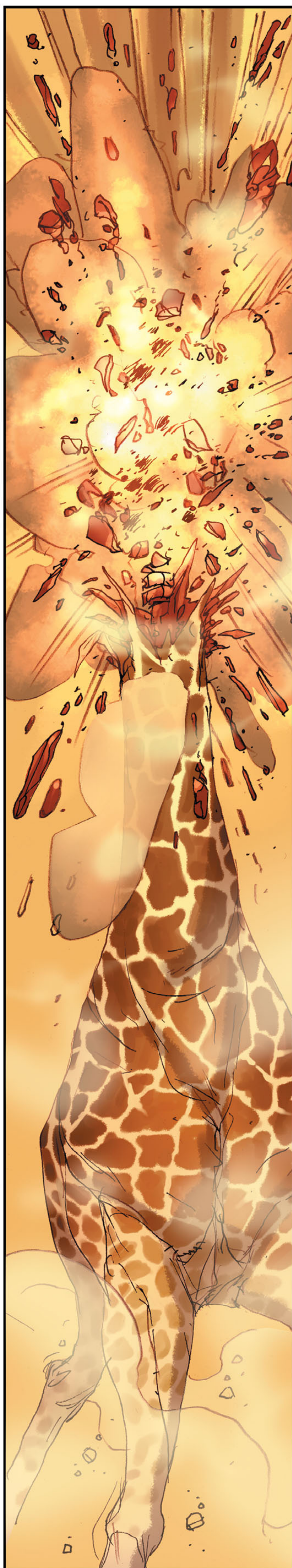
I want to die of *old age*, Zill.

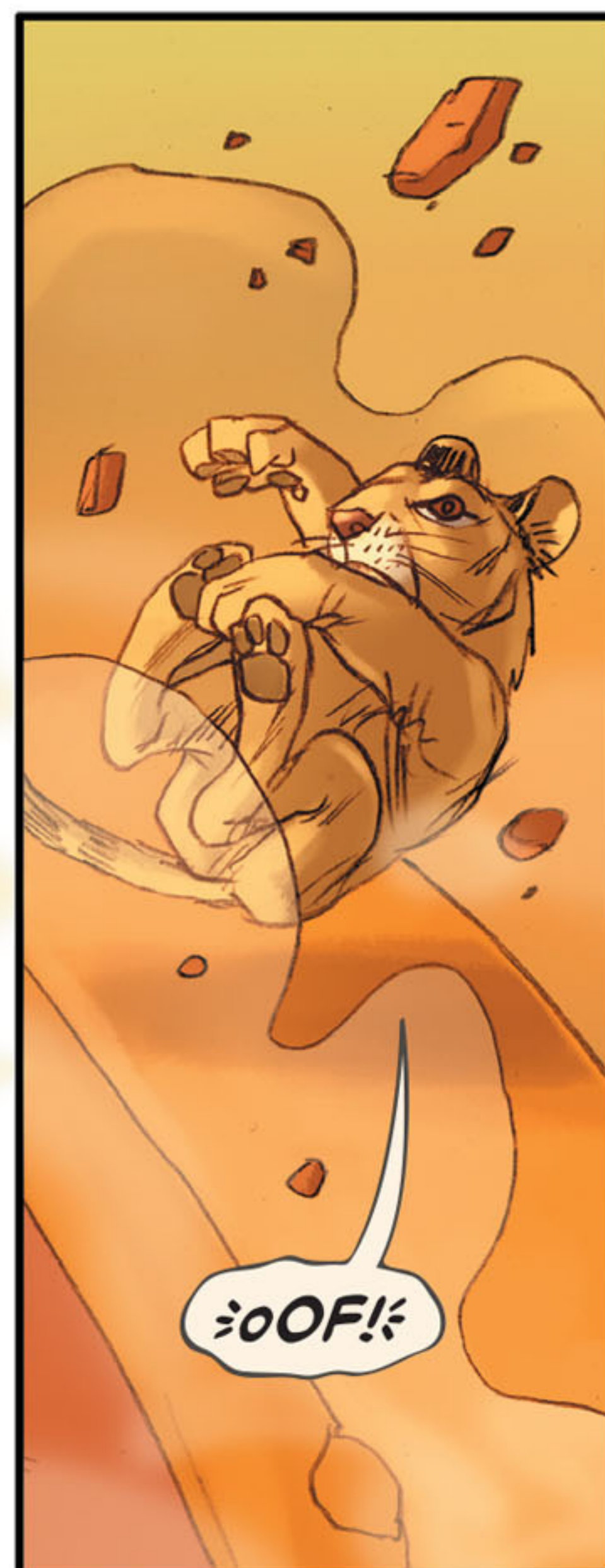
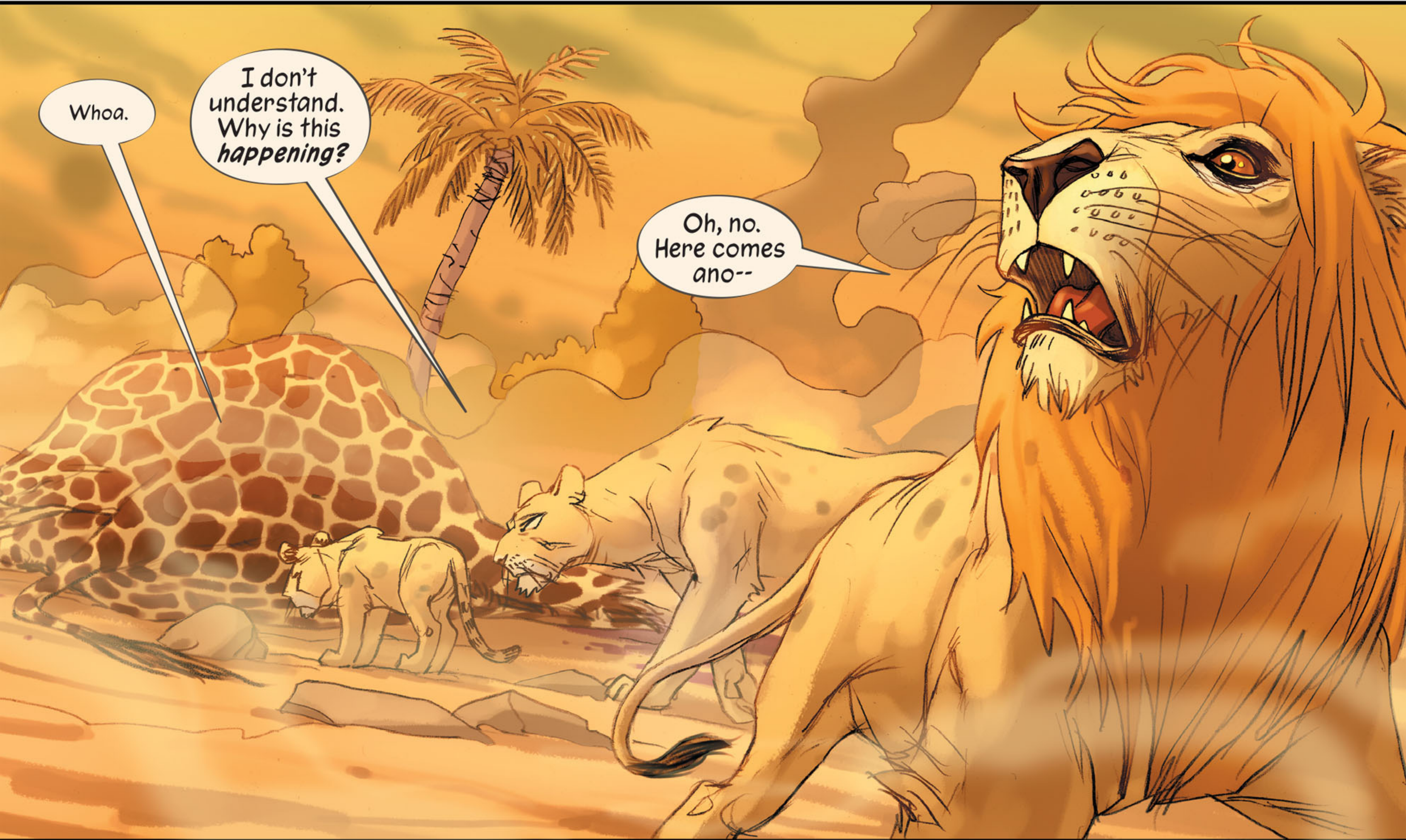
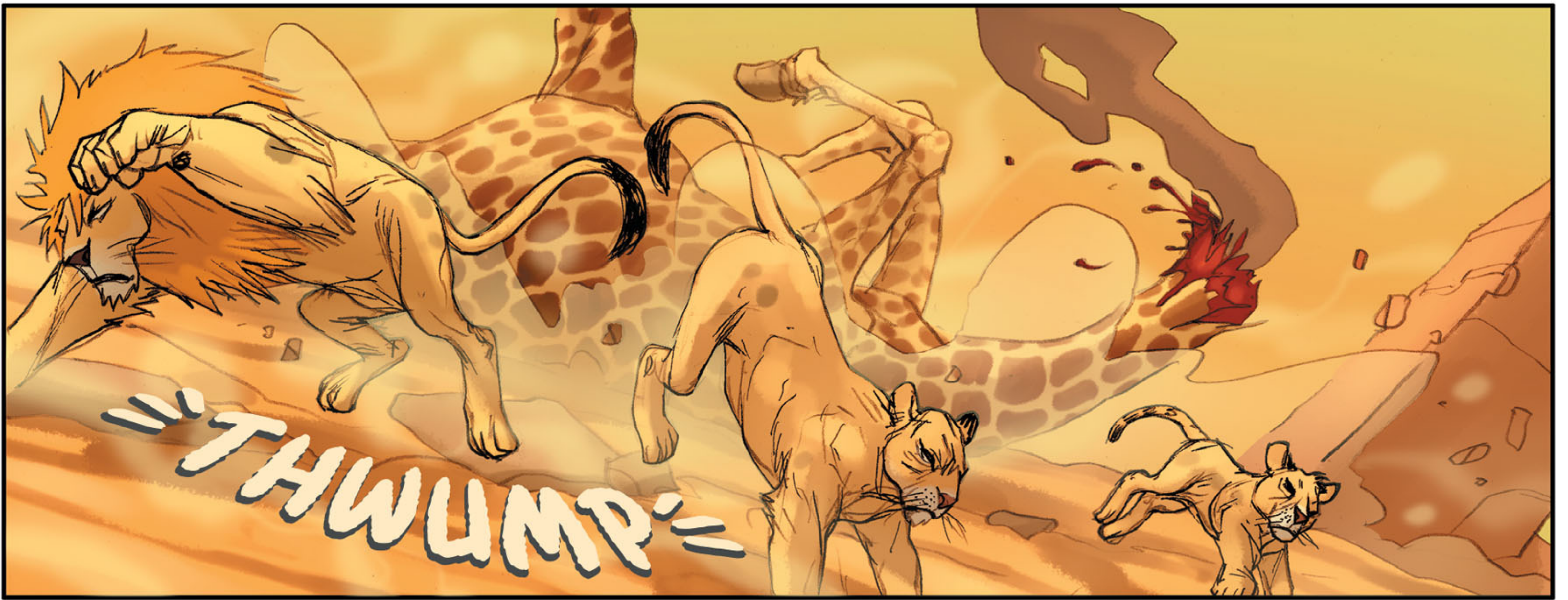
If the zoo is the price I have to pay for that, then so be it.

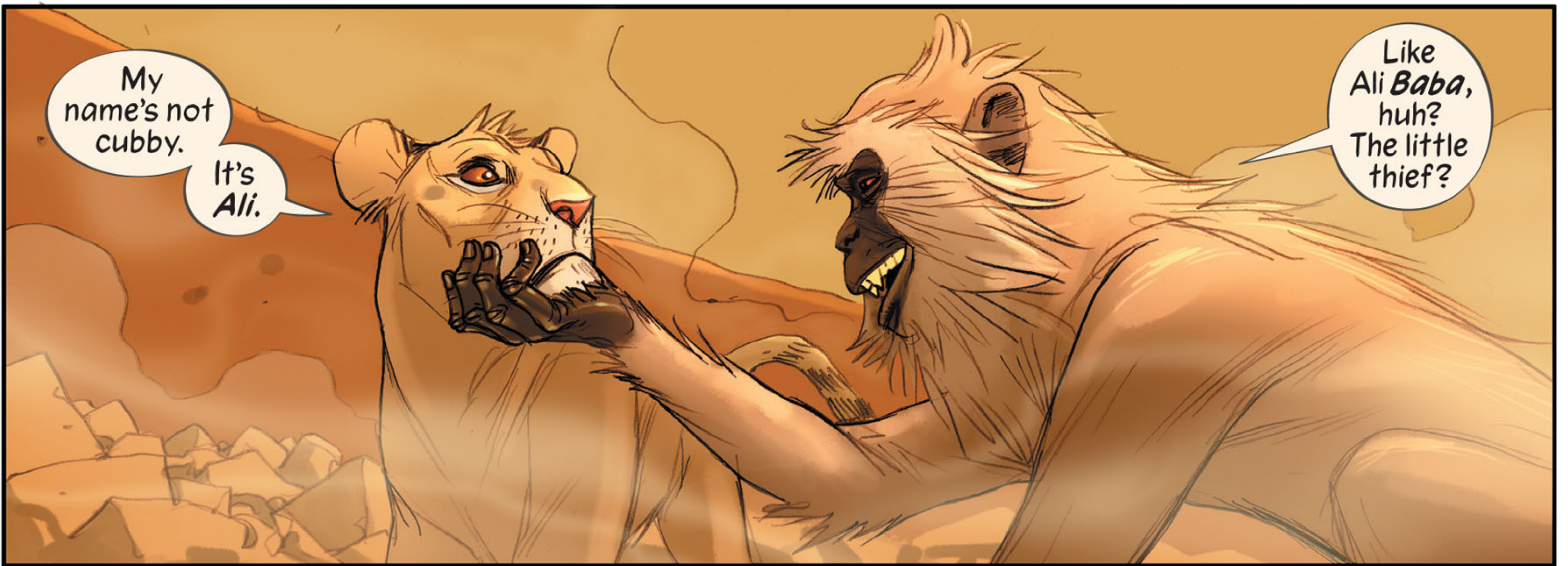
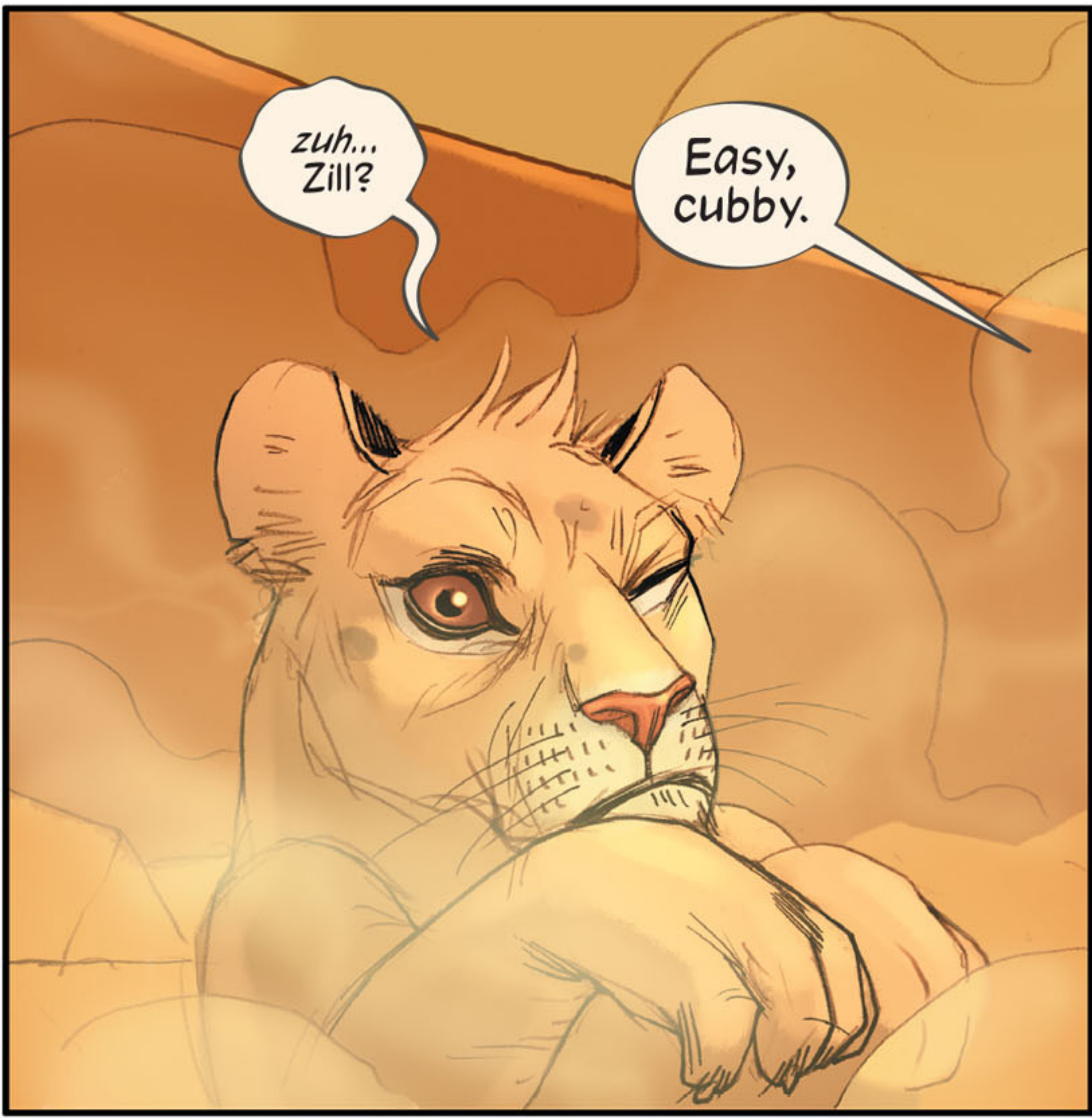




...we
have other
things to
worry
about.









Hey!

Put me down!

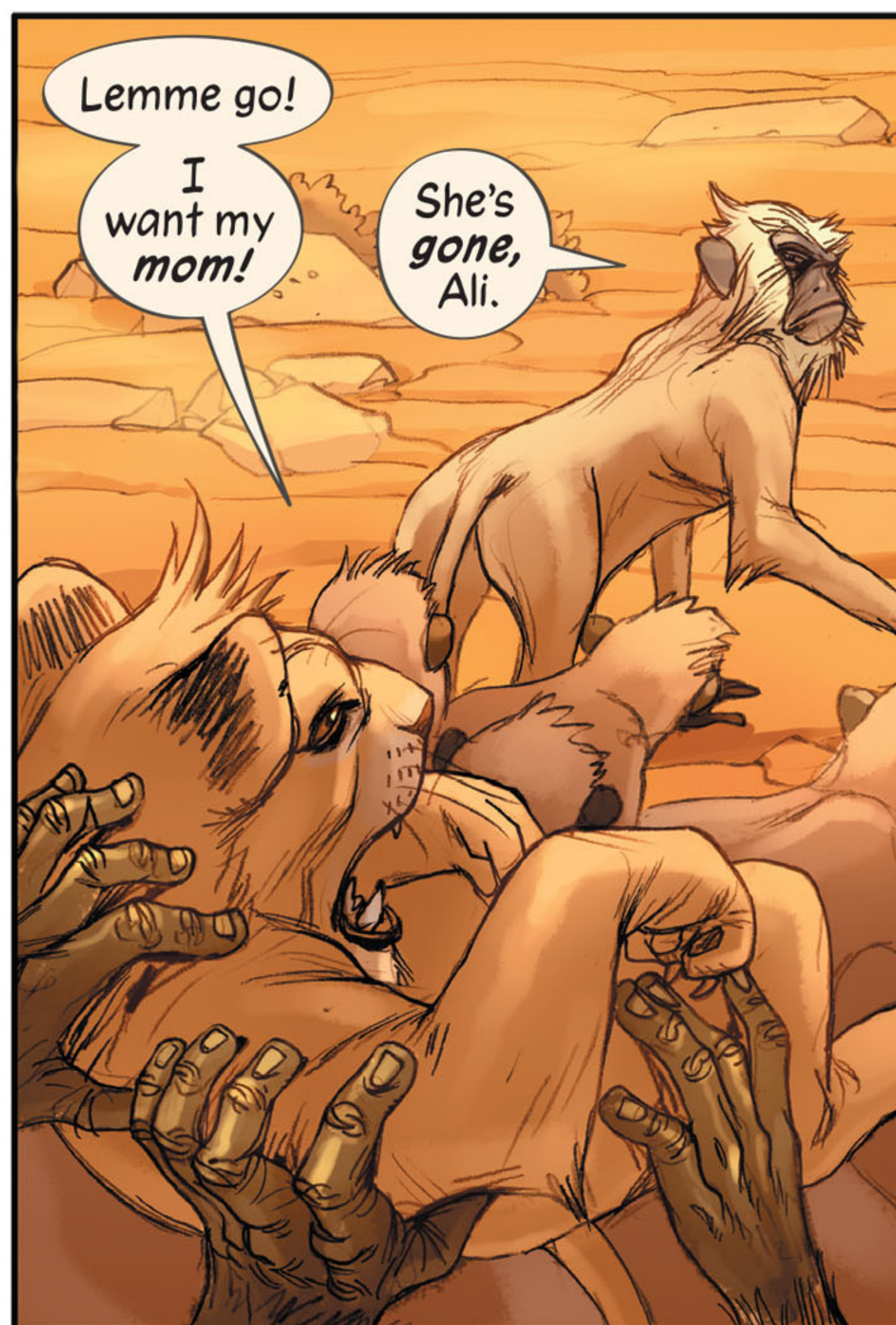
Be cool, Ali. Us orphans gotta stick together, right?



Orphans...?

We used to have to settle for whatever stale rinds the *keepers* tossed us, but not anymore. Their world's our melon now, and it's ripe for the *picking*.

With muscle like you on our side, *nobody's* gonna stop us from taking whatever we want.



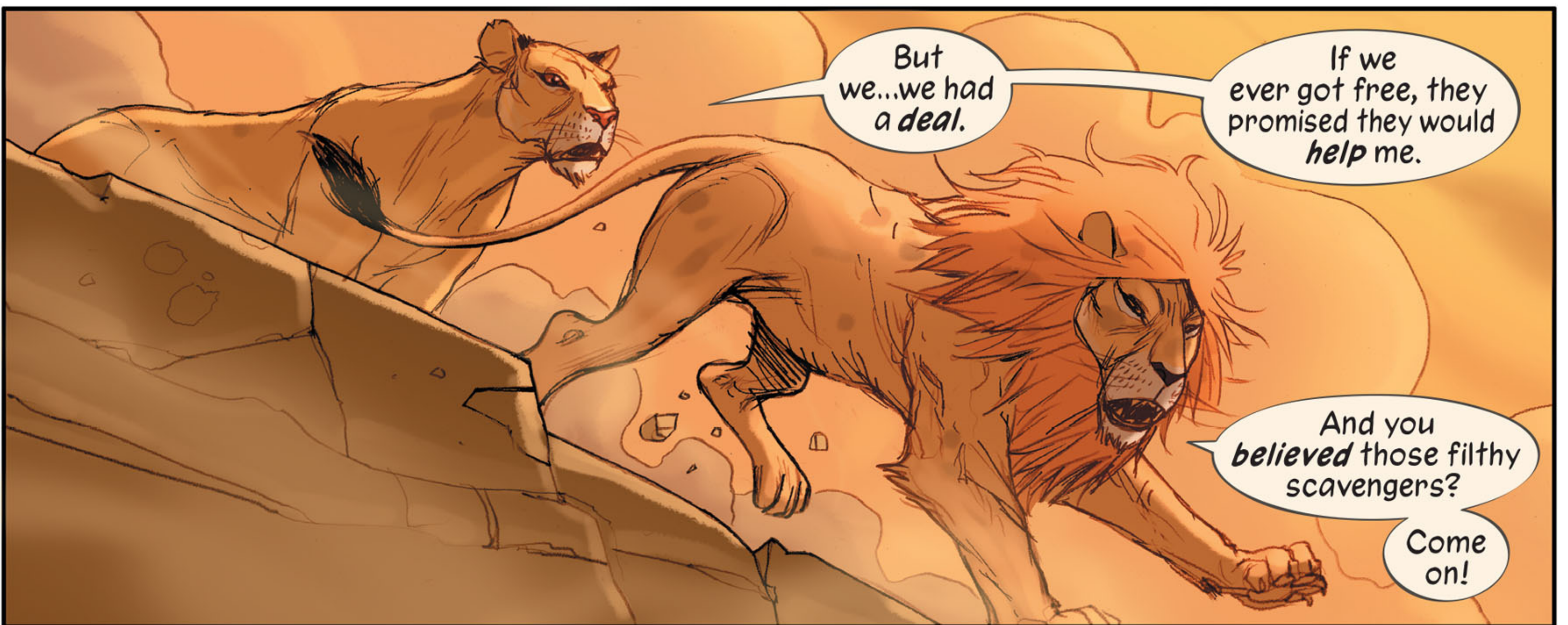
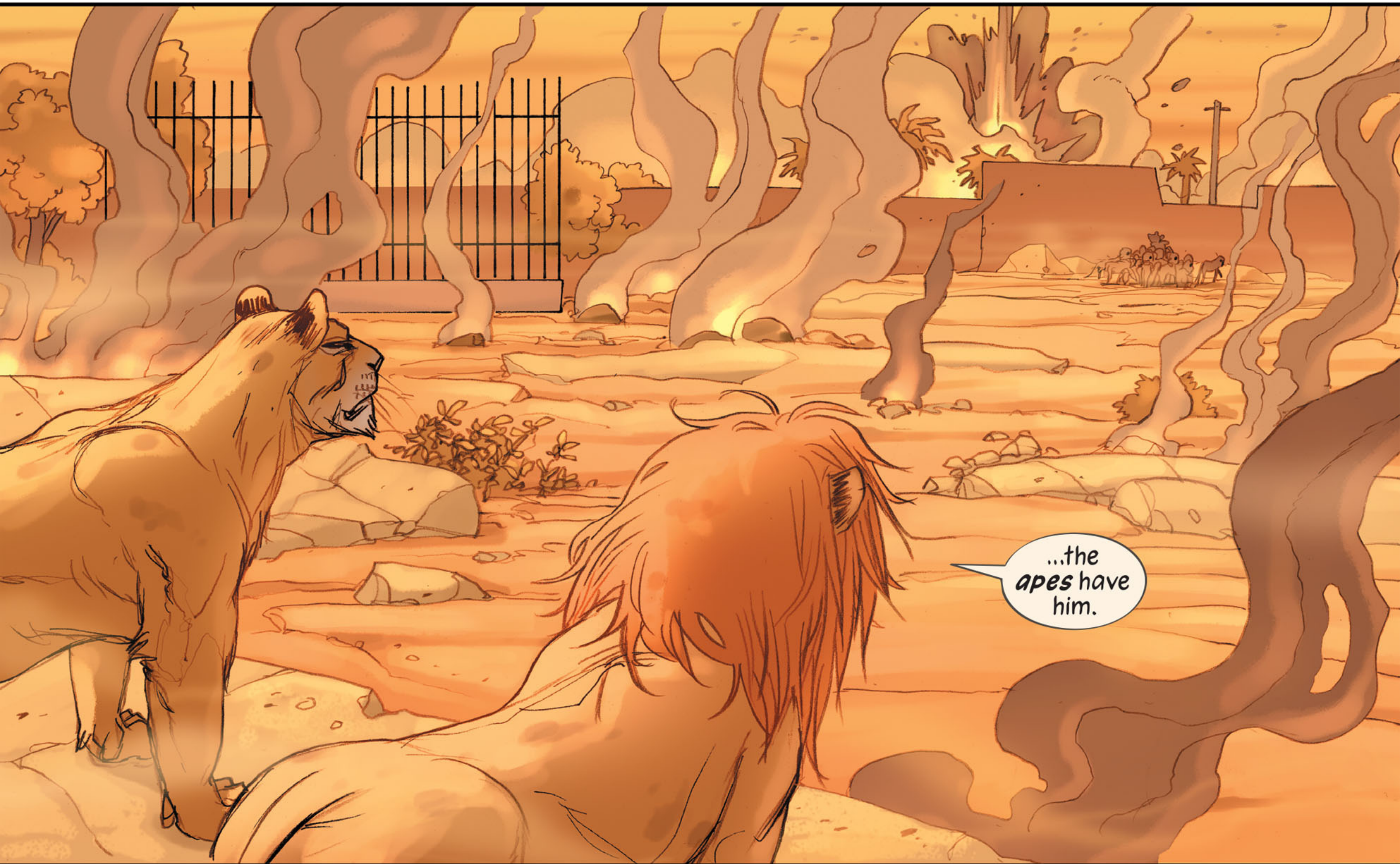
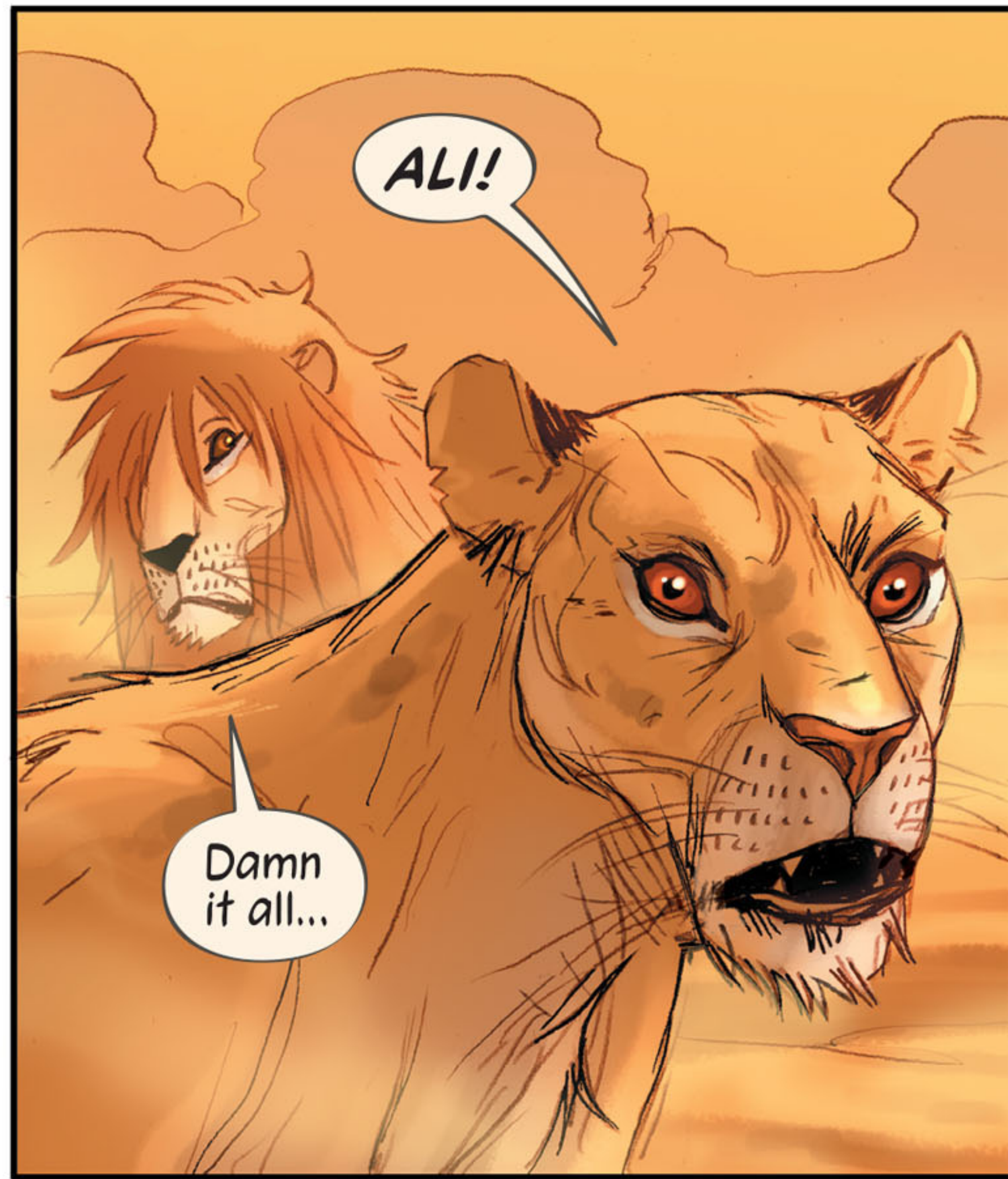
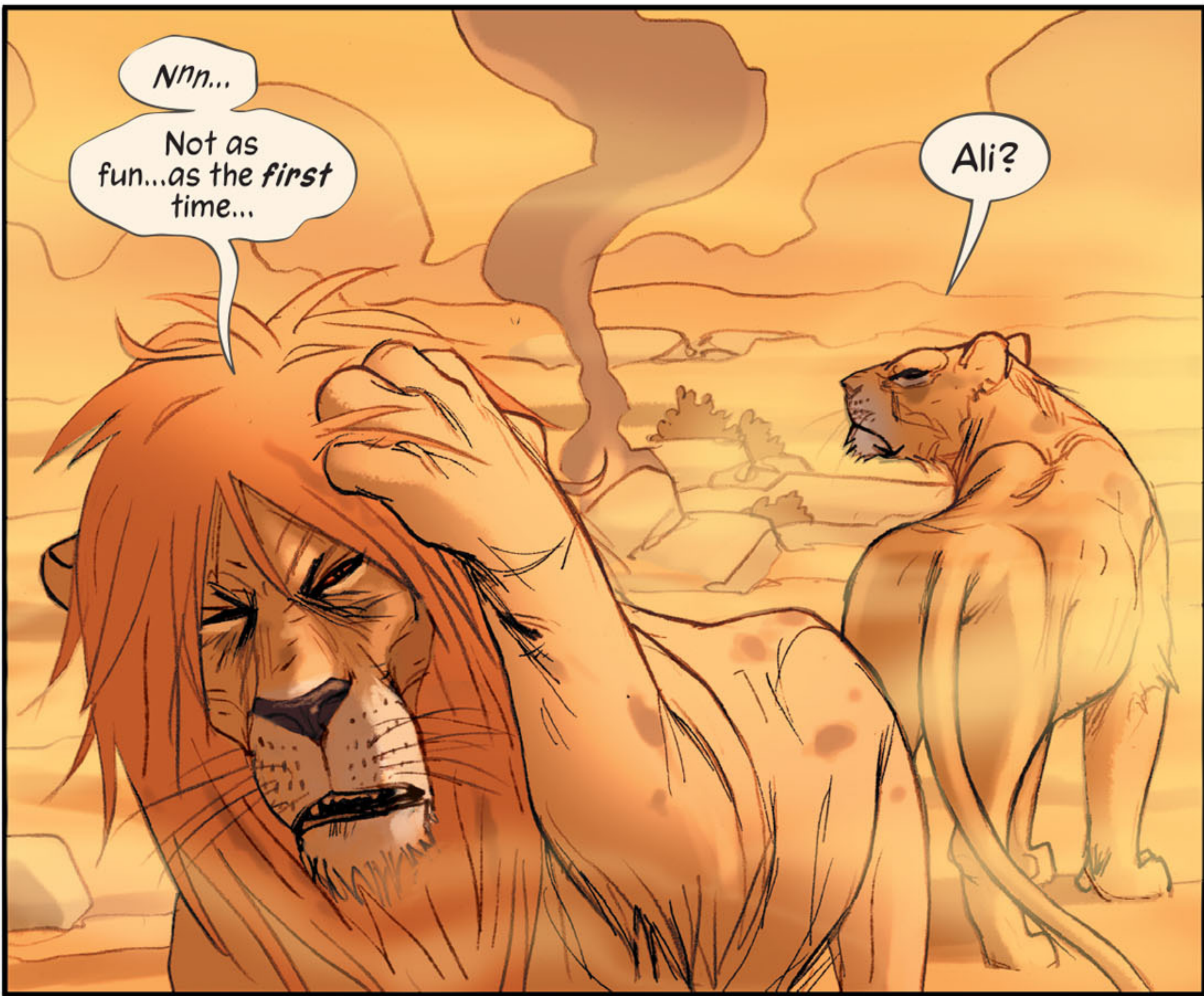
Lemme go!

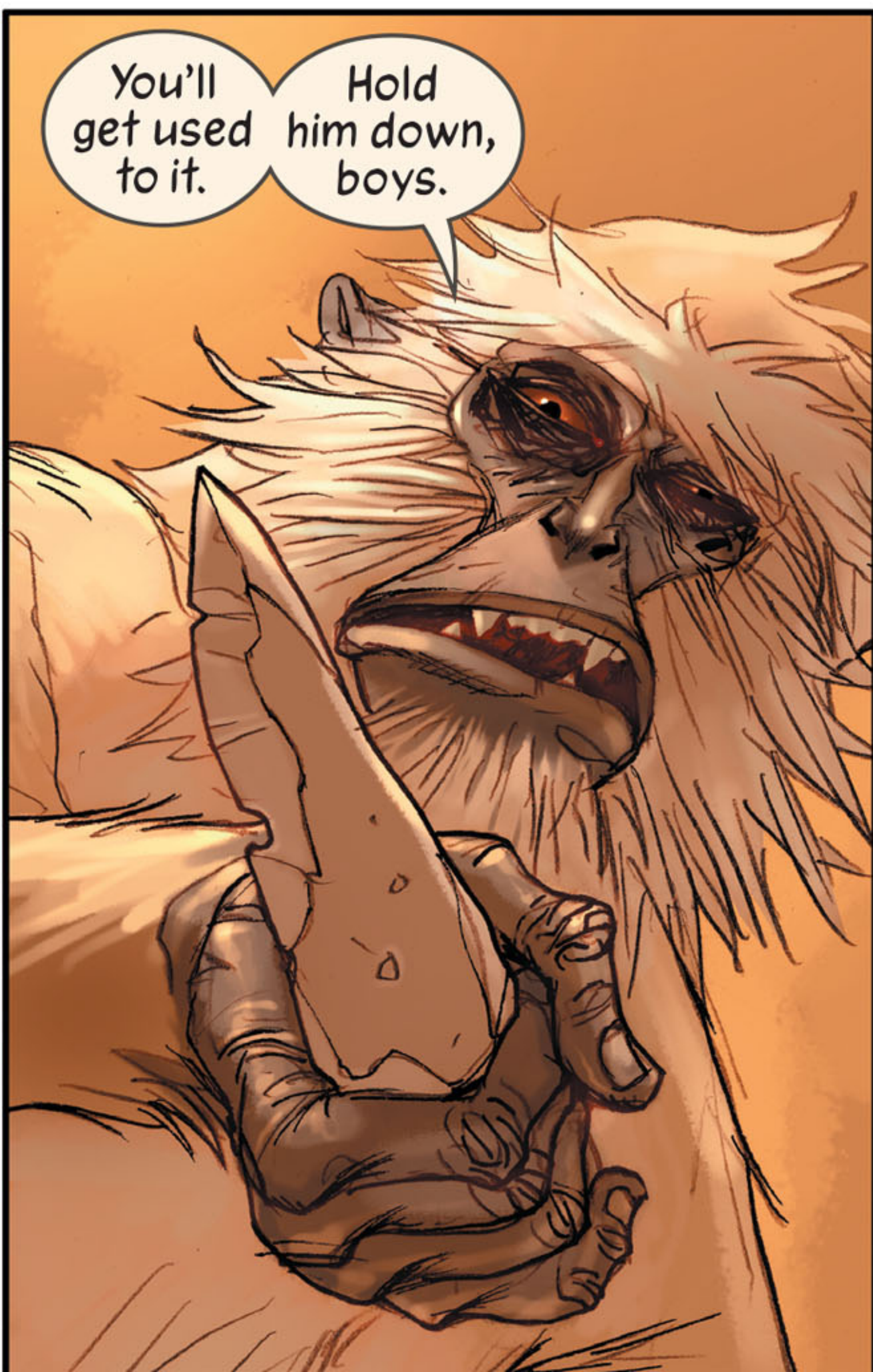
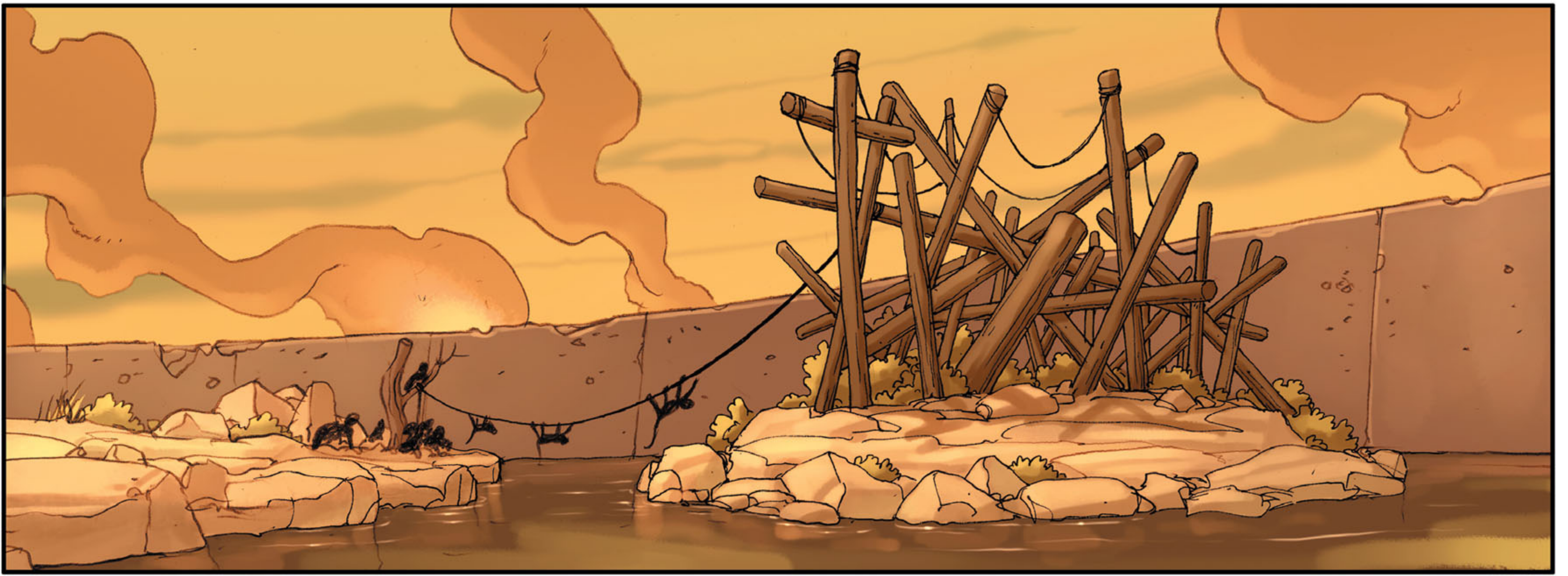
I want my *mom*!

She's *gone*, Ali.



We're your family now.

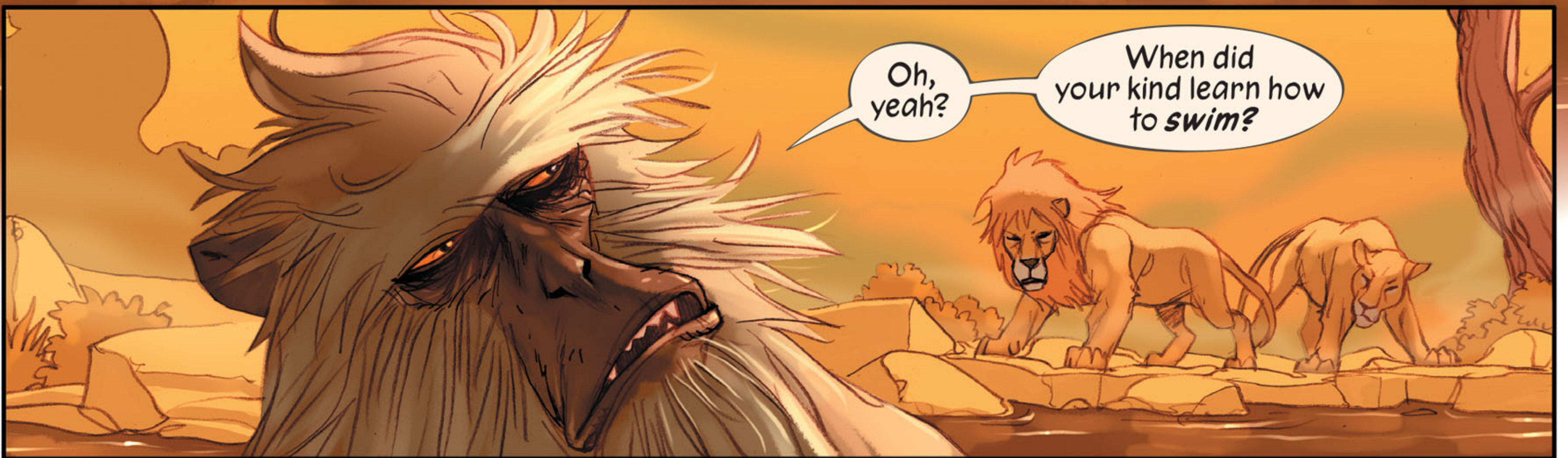






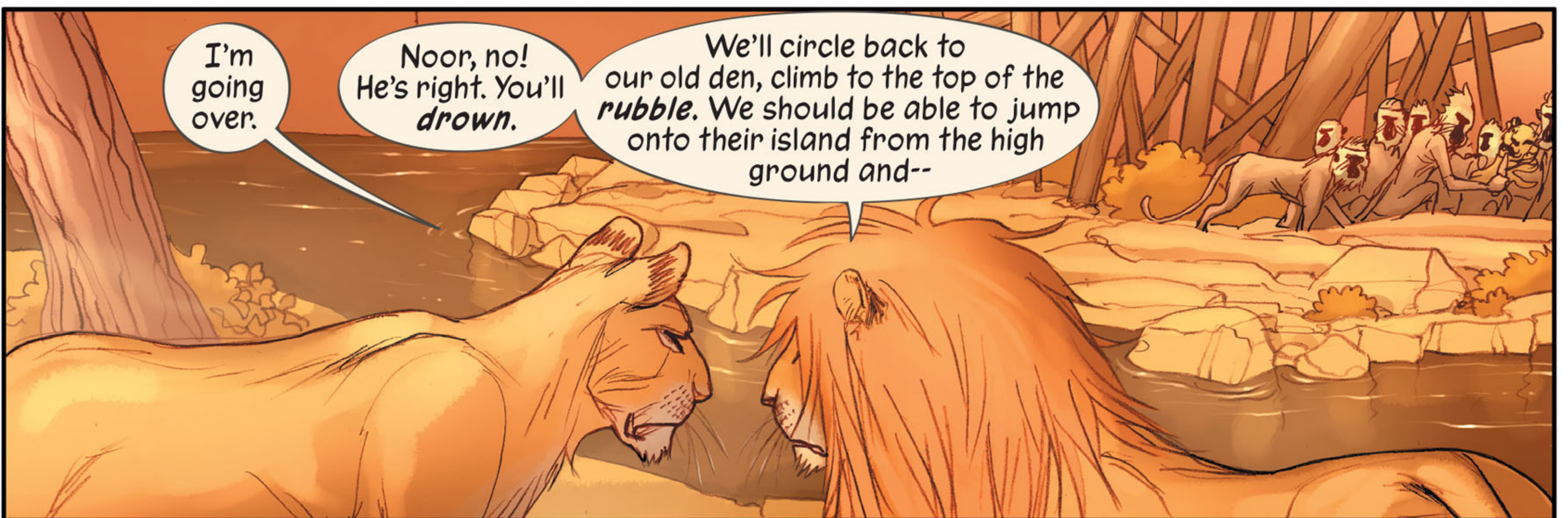
Let him *go*!

Or I'll *eviscerate* every last one of you!



Oh, yeah?

When did your kind learn how to *swim*?



I'm going over.

Noor, no! He's right. You'll *drown*.

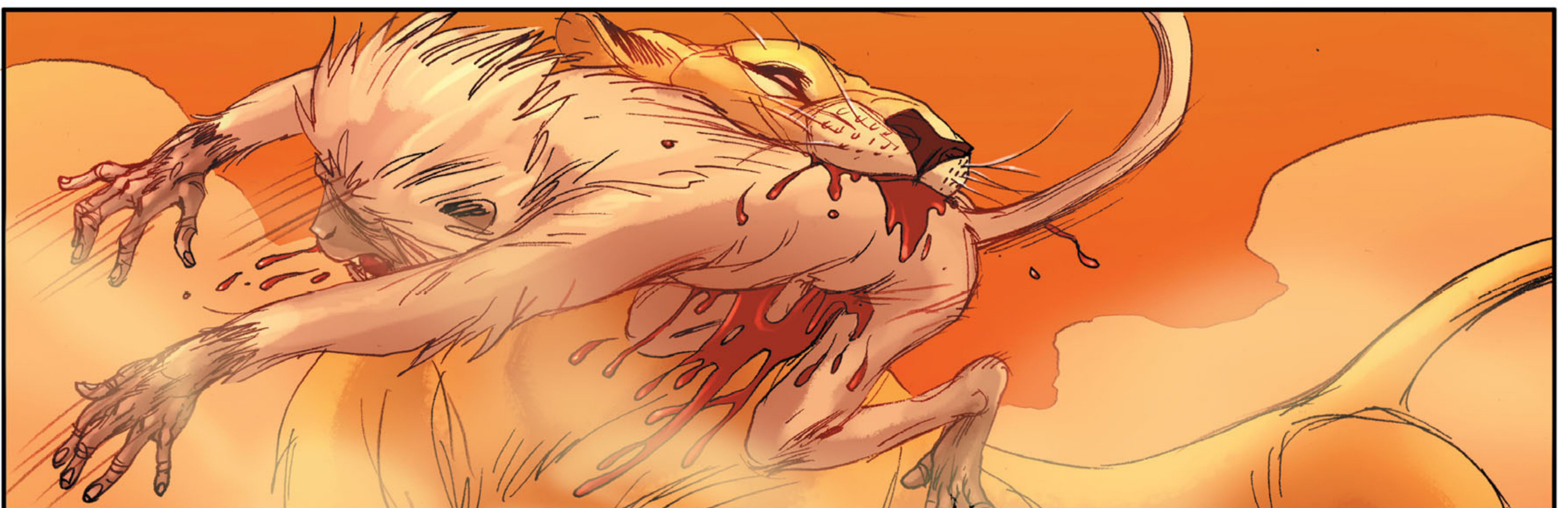
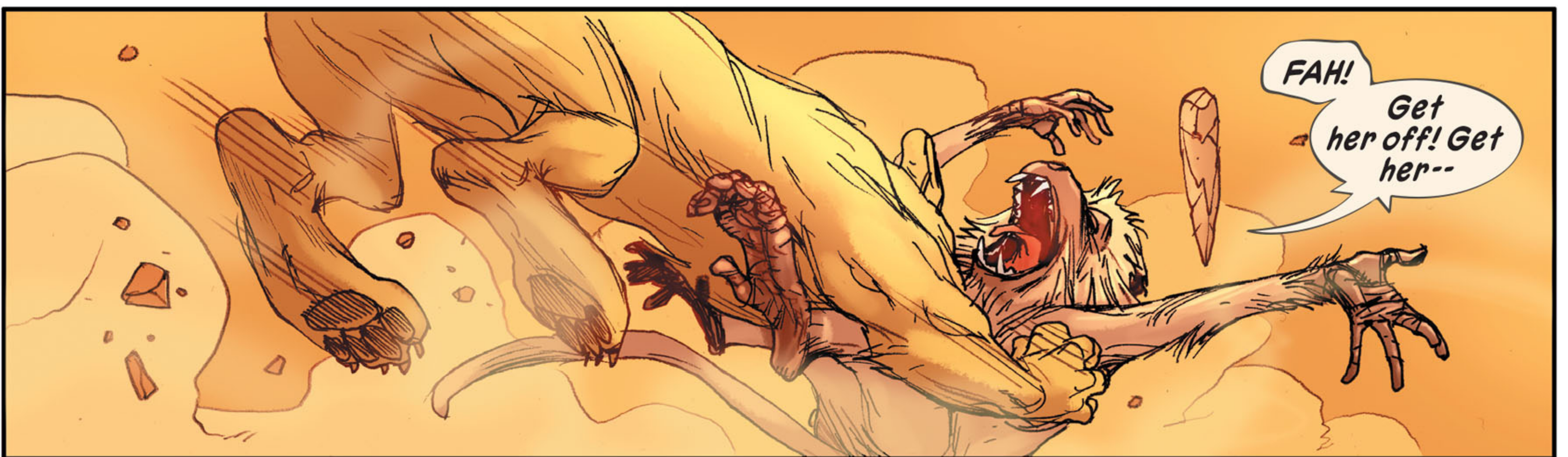
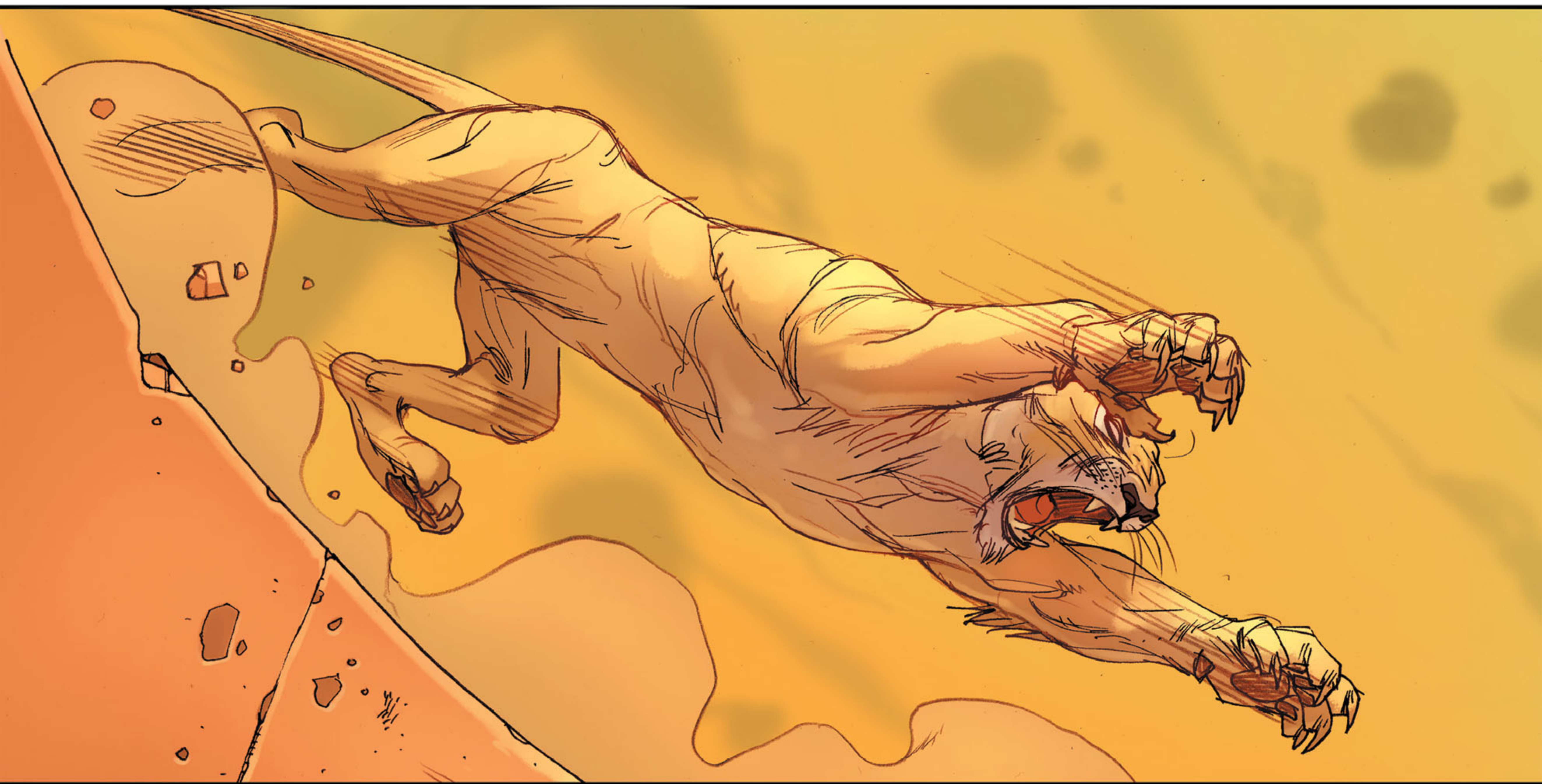
We'll circle back to our old den, climb to the top of the *ruddle*. We should be able to jump onto their island from the high ground and--

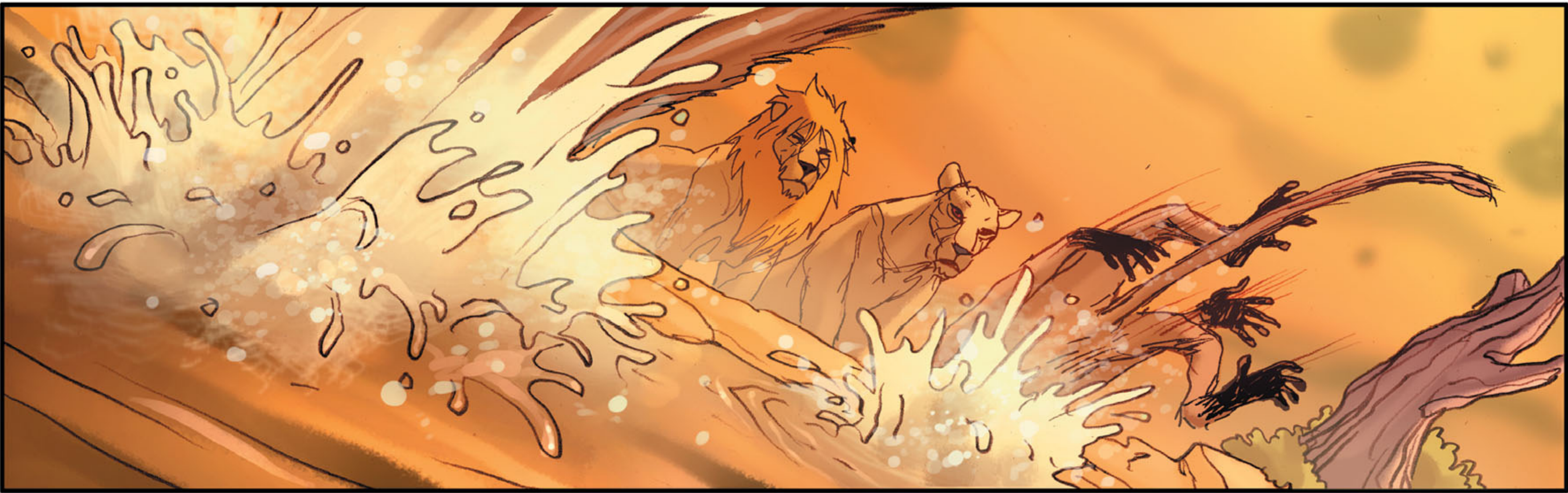
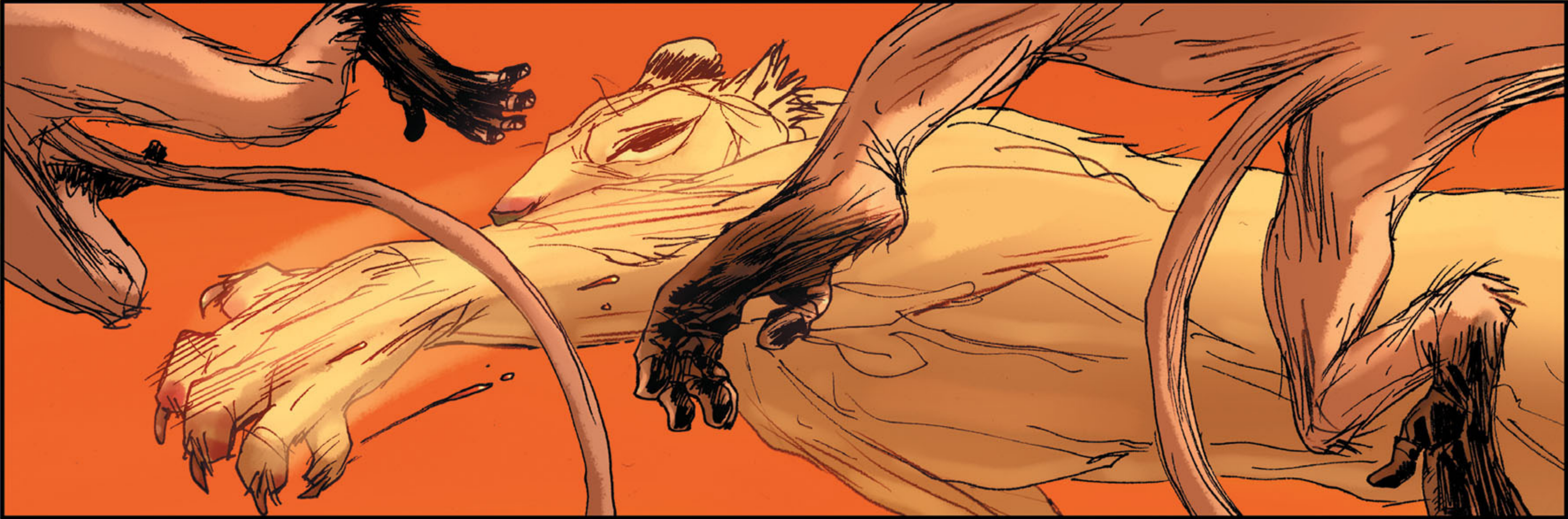
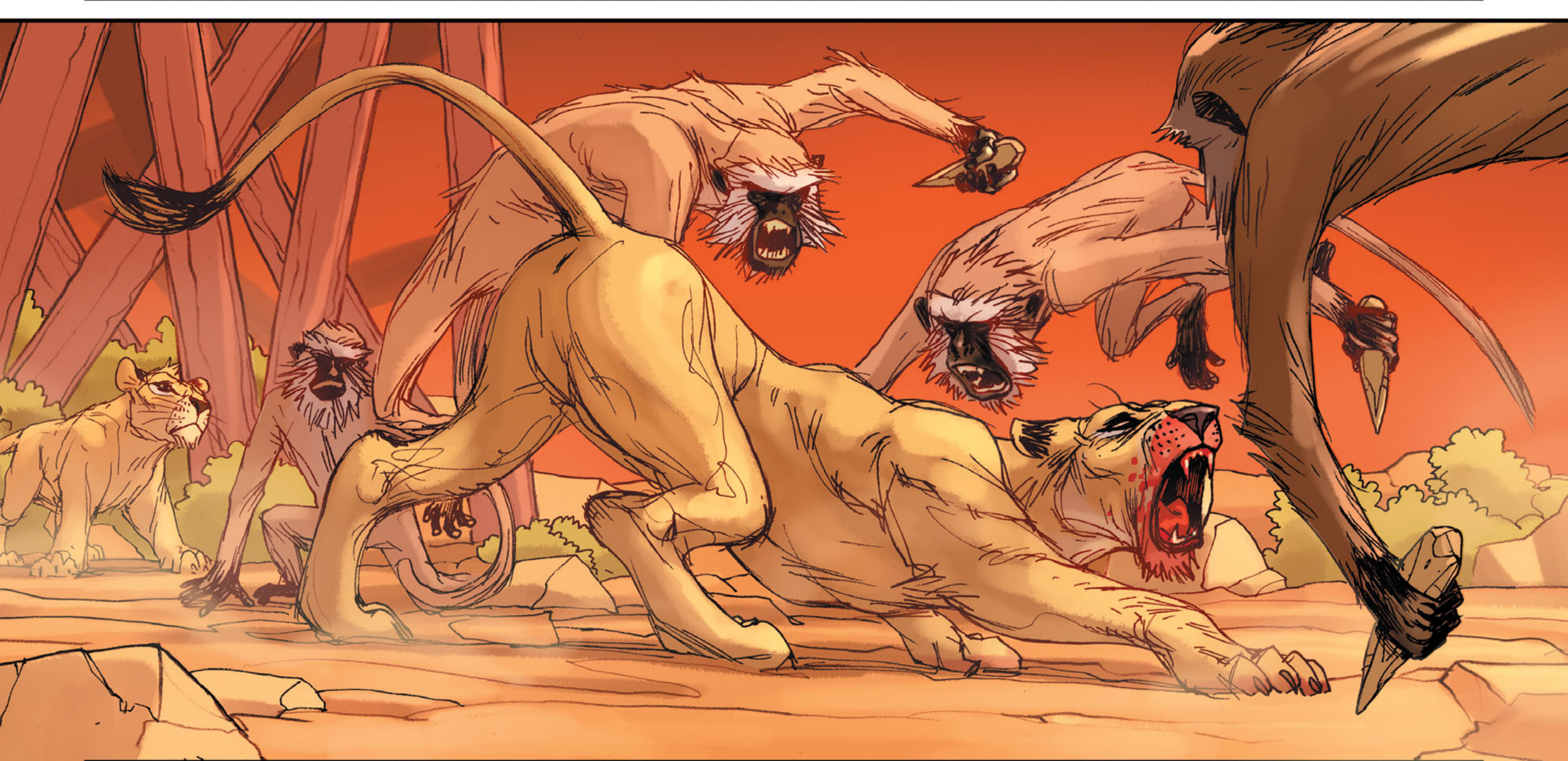
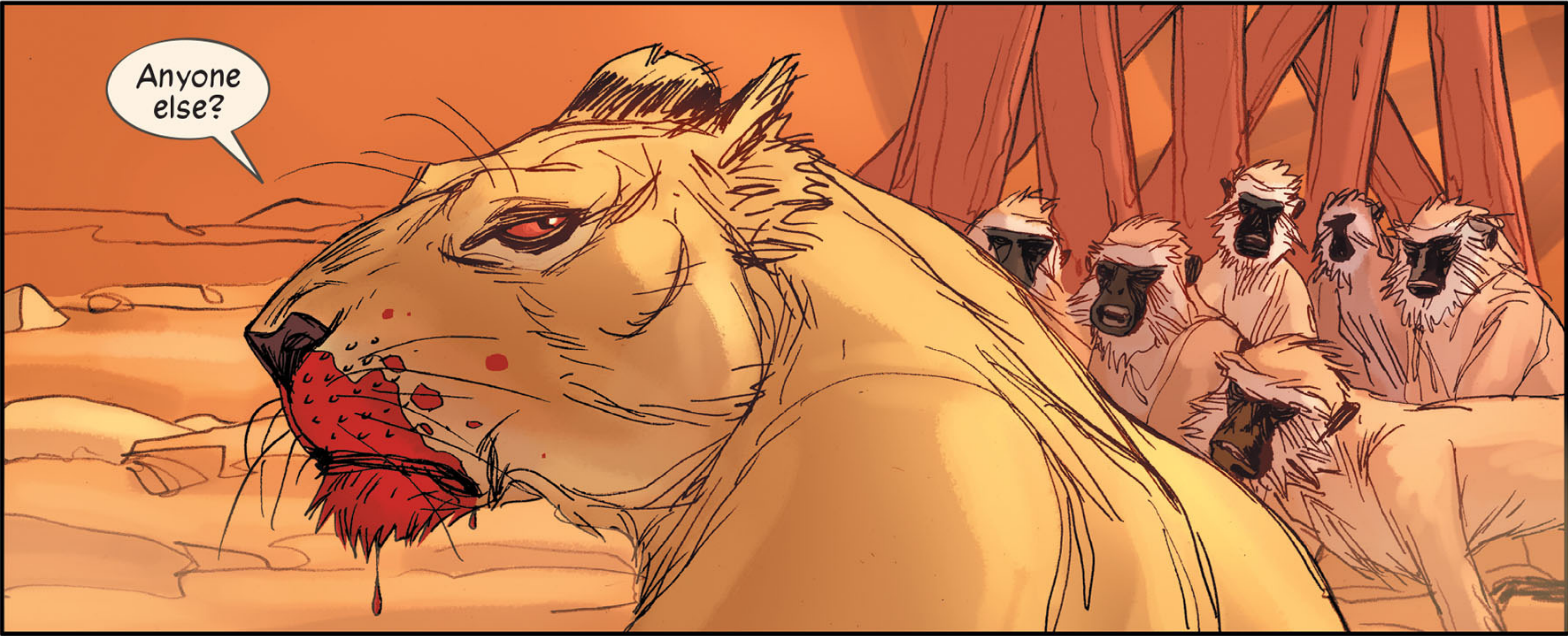


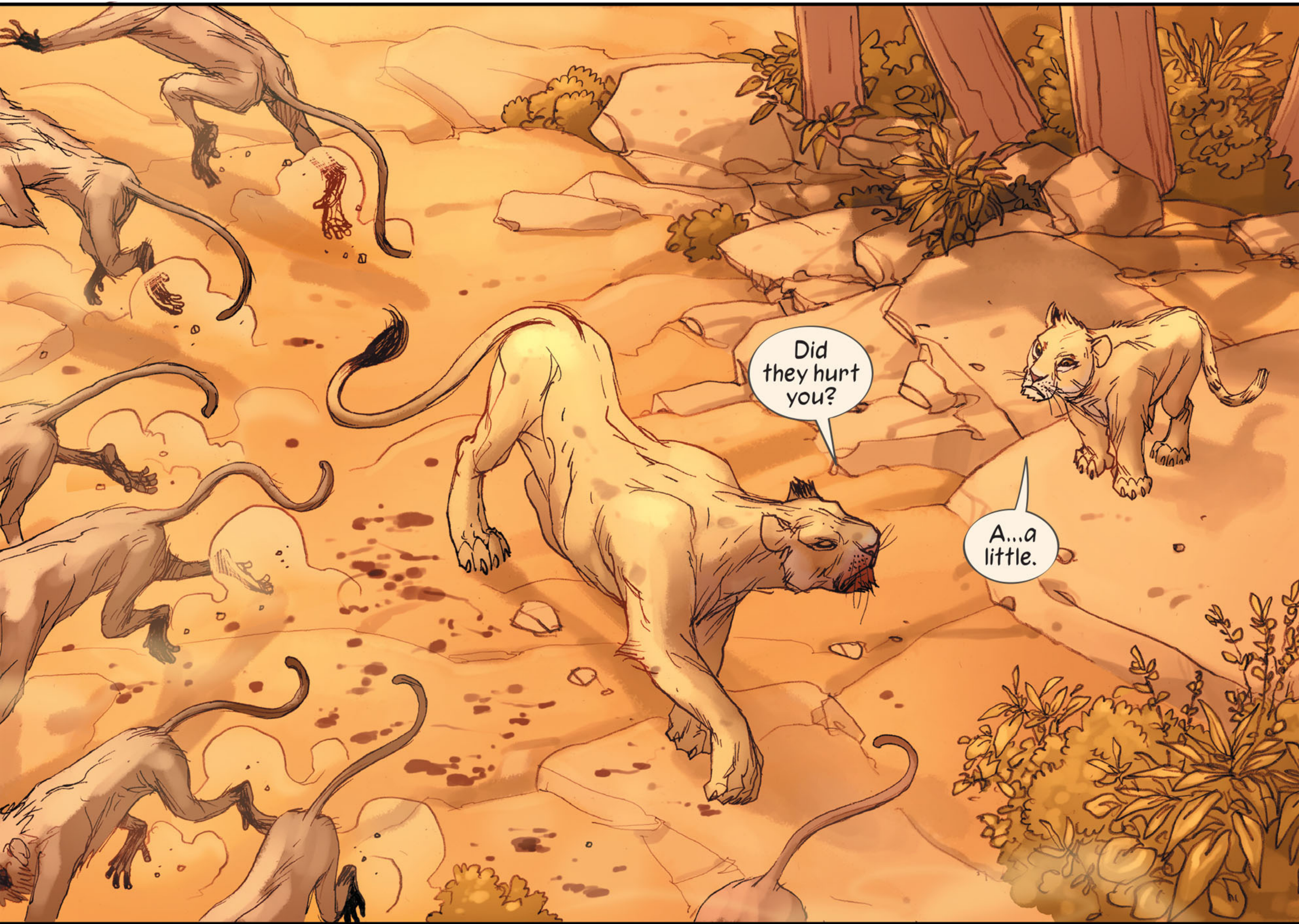
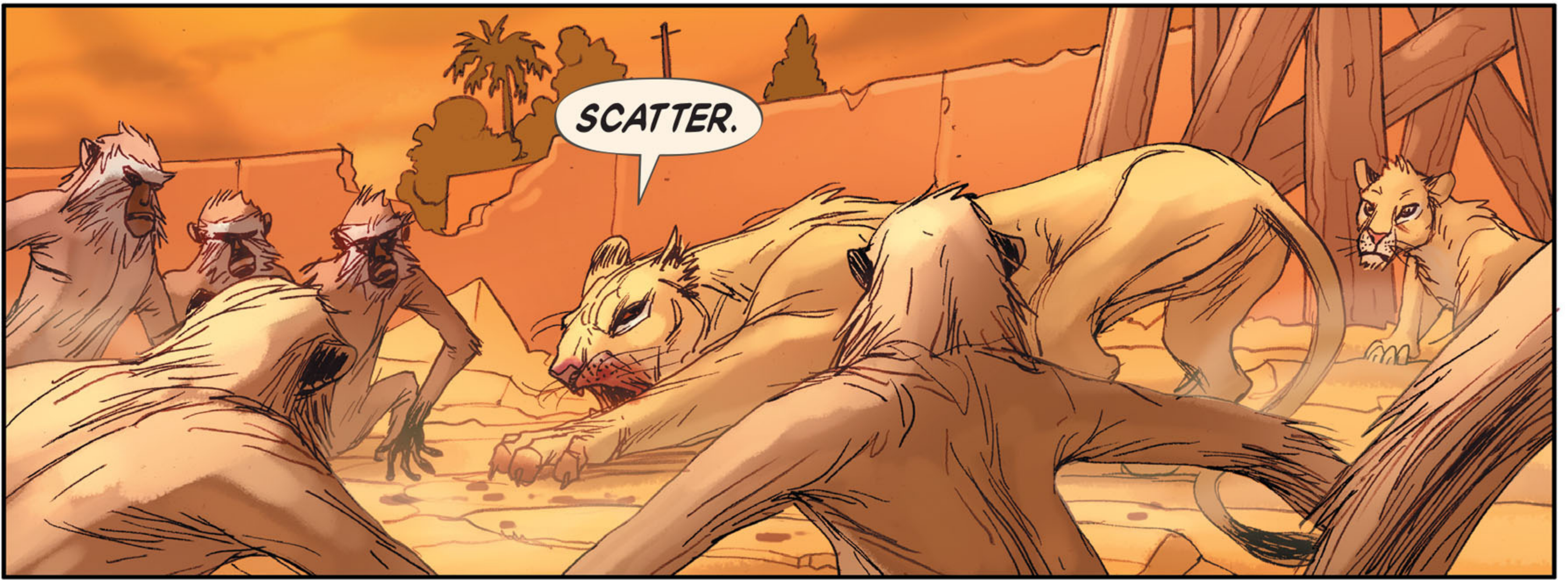
We don't have time! This is my *child*, you craven son of a--

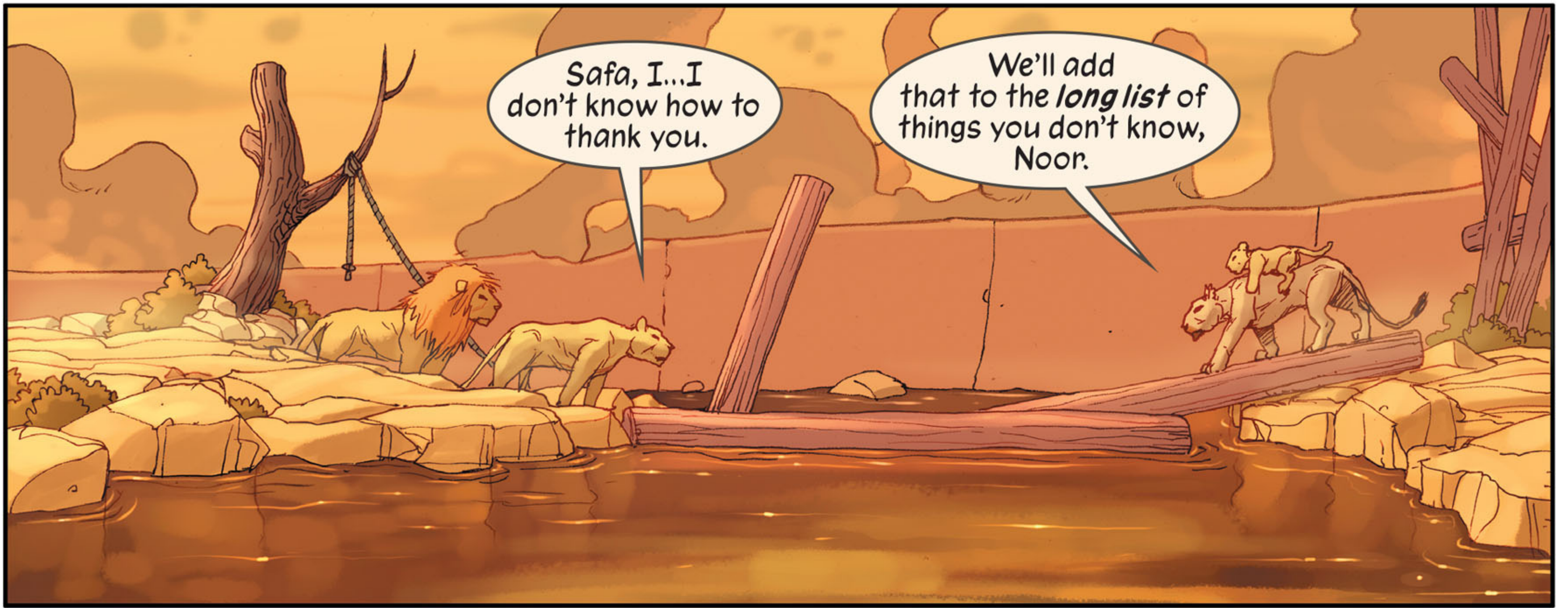
MOM! HELP!!





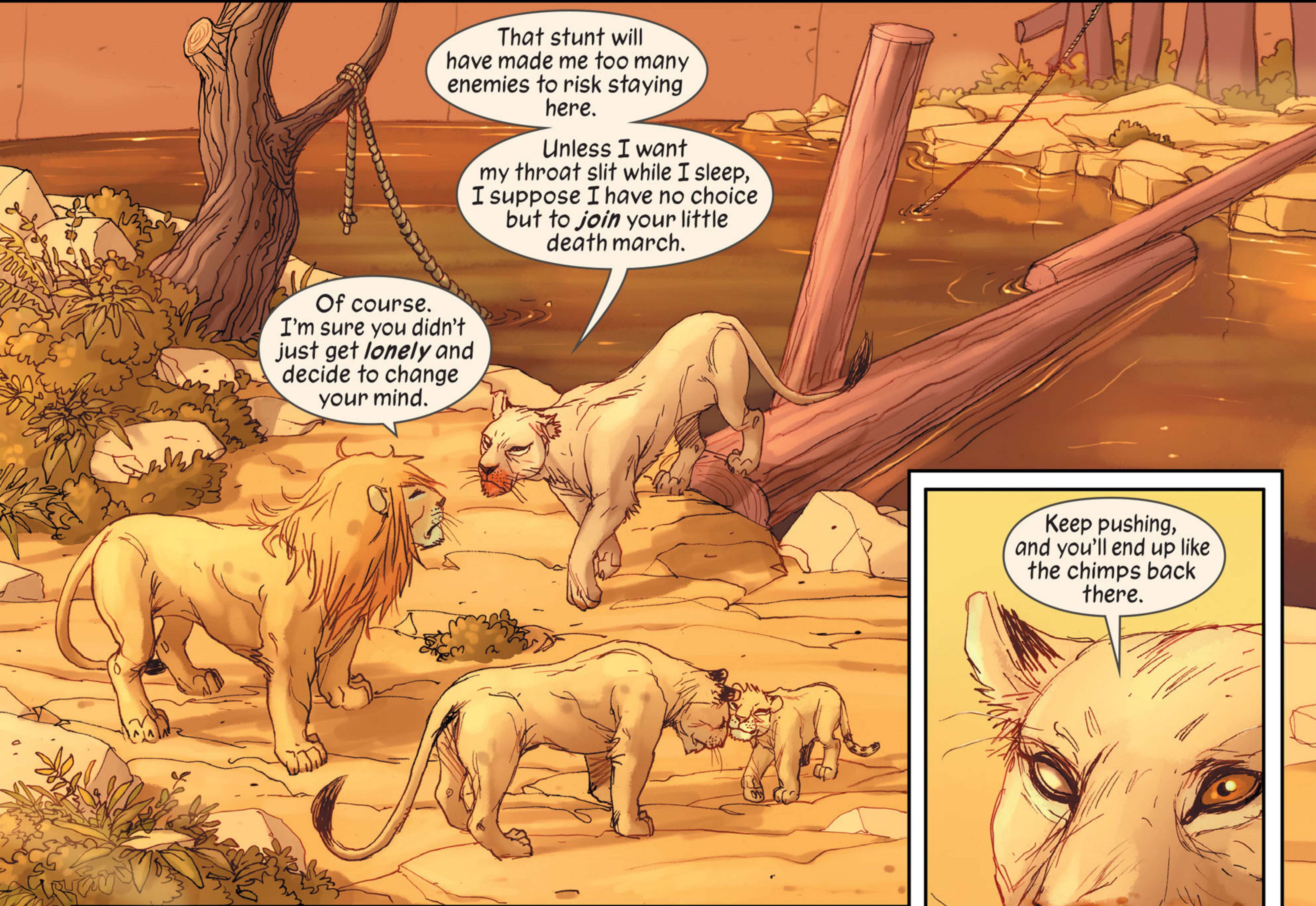






Safa, I...I don't know how to thank you.

We'll add that to the *long list* of things you don't know, Noor.



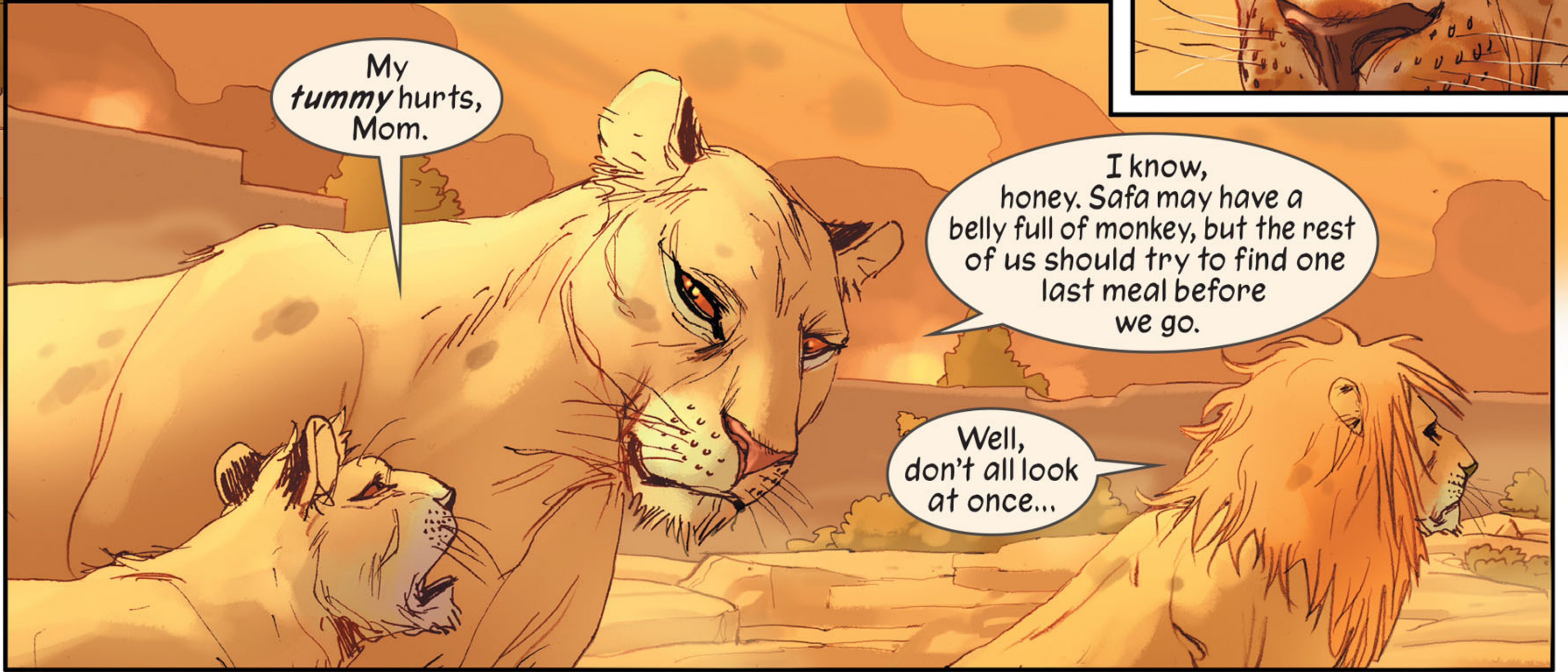
That stunt will have made me too many enemies to risk staying here.

Unless I want my throat slit while I sleep, I suppose I have no choice but to *join* your little death march.

Of course. I'm sure you didn't just get *lonely* and decide to change your mind.



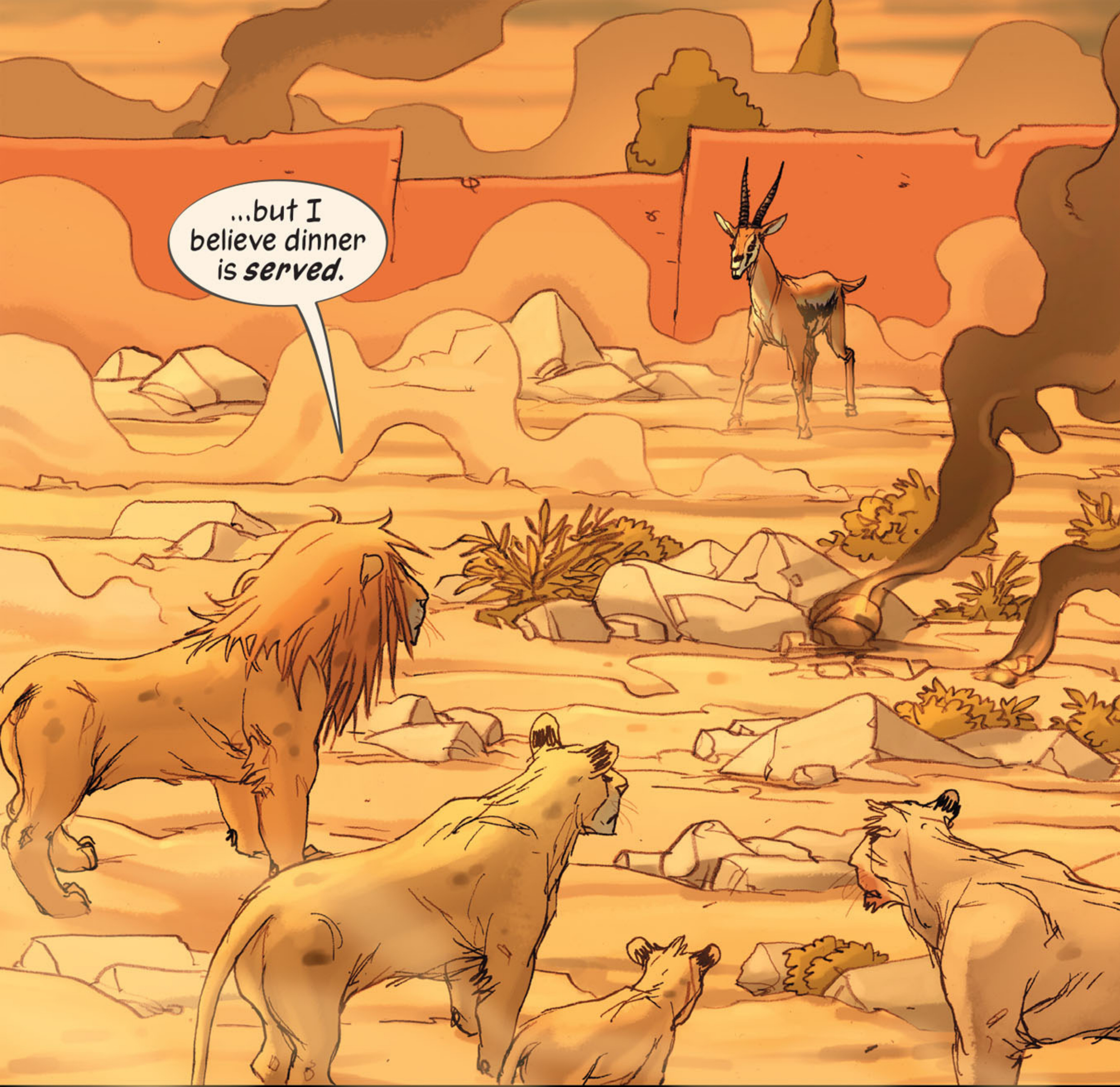
Keep pushing, and you'll end up like the chimps back there.



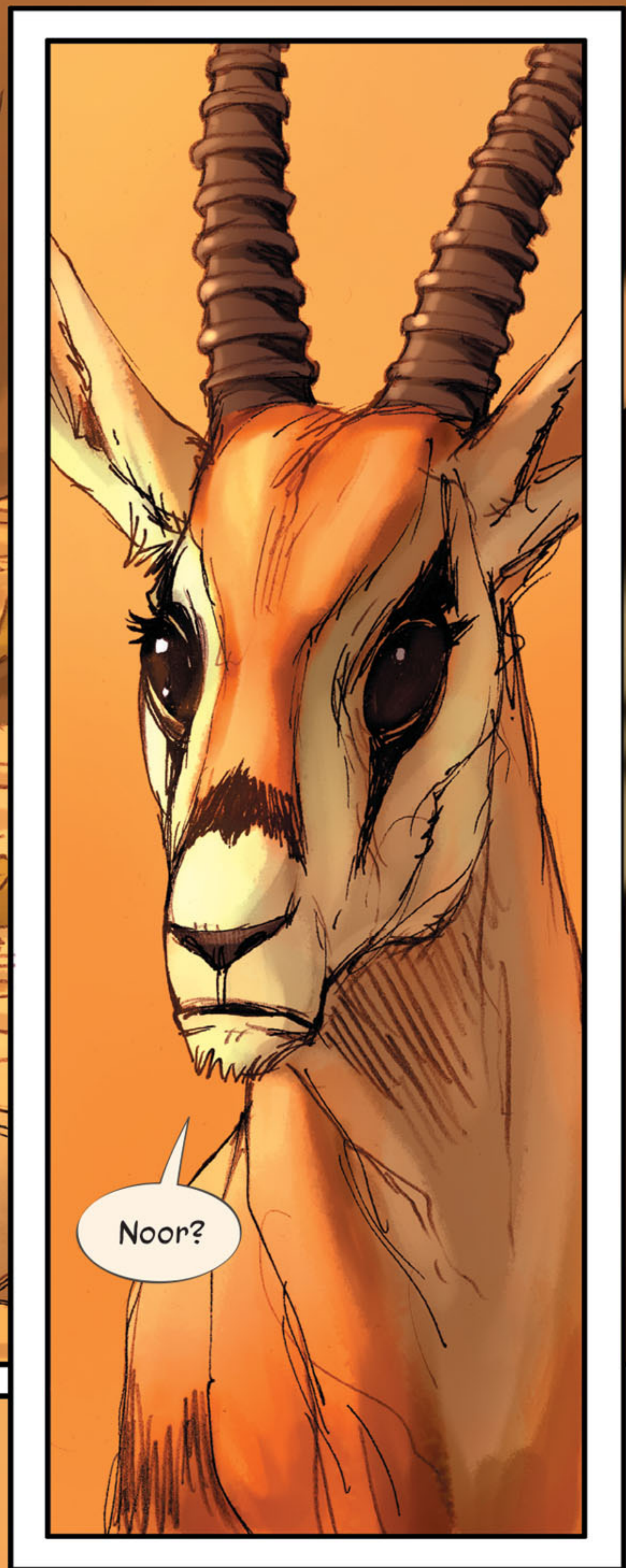
My *tummy* hurts, Mom.

I know, honey. Safa may have a belly full of monkey, but the rest of us should try to find one last meal before we go.

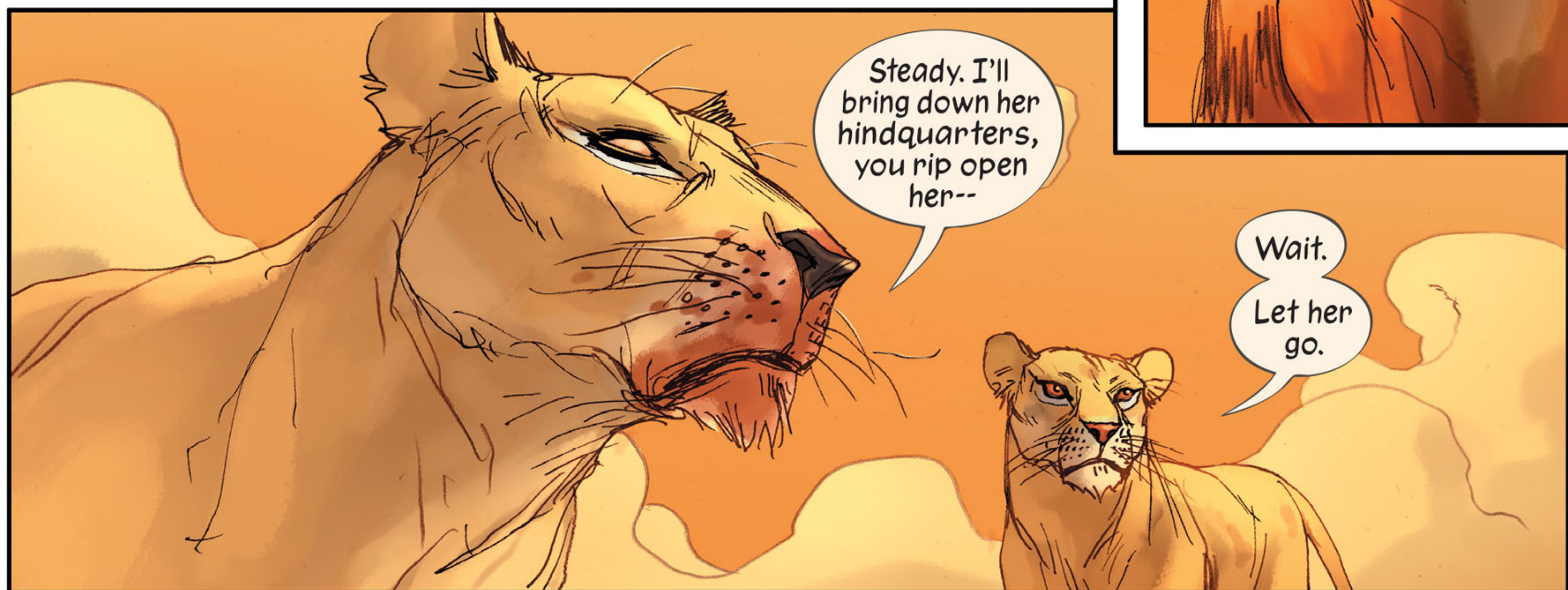
Well, don't all look at once...



...but I believe dinner is *served*.

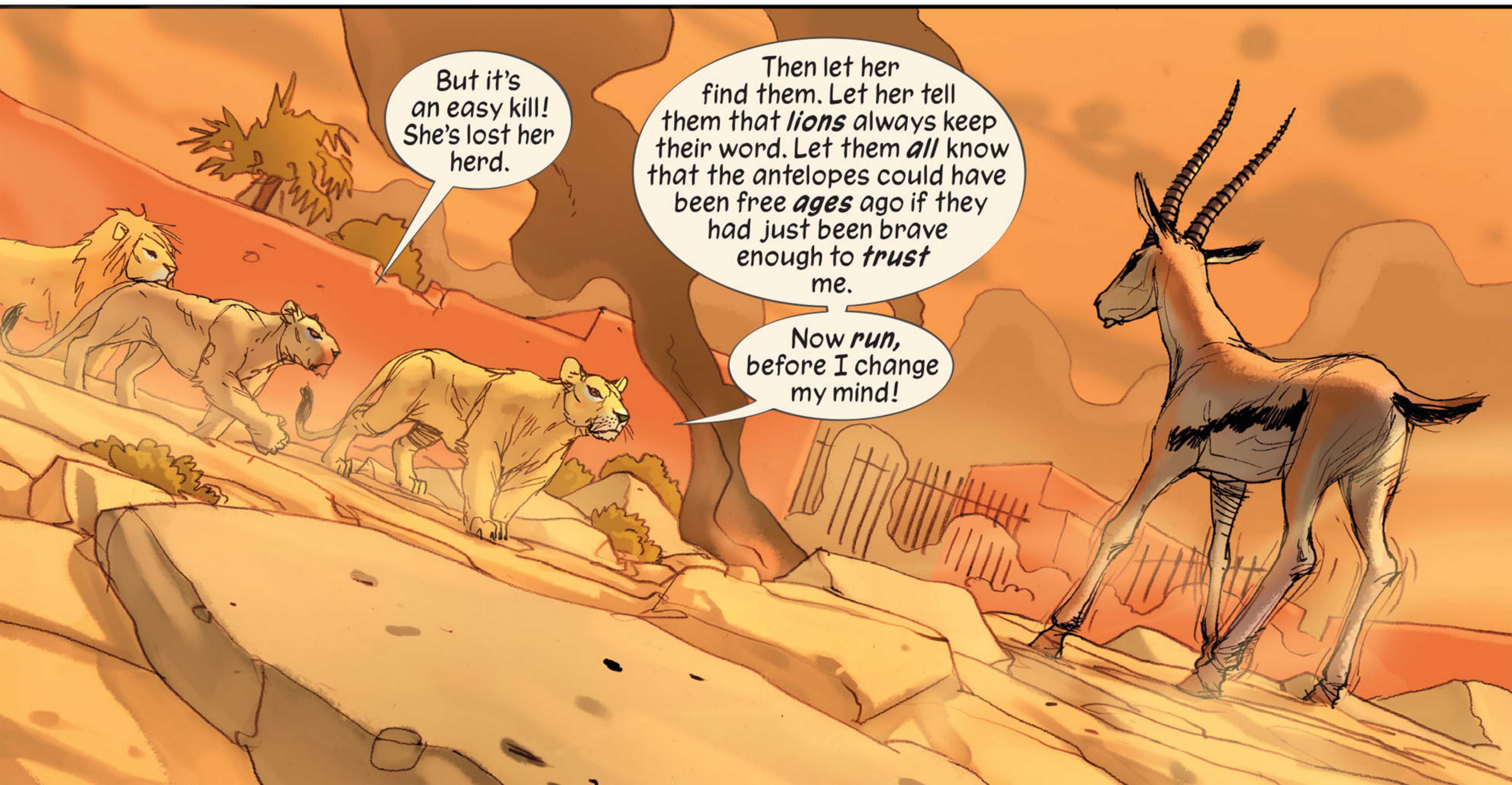


Noor?



Steady. I'll bring down her hindquarters, you rip open her--

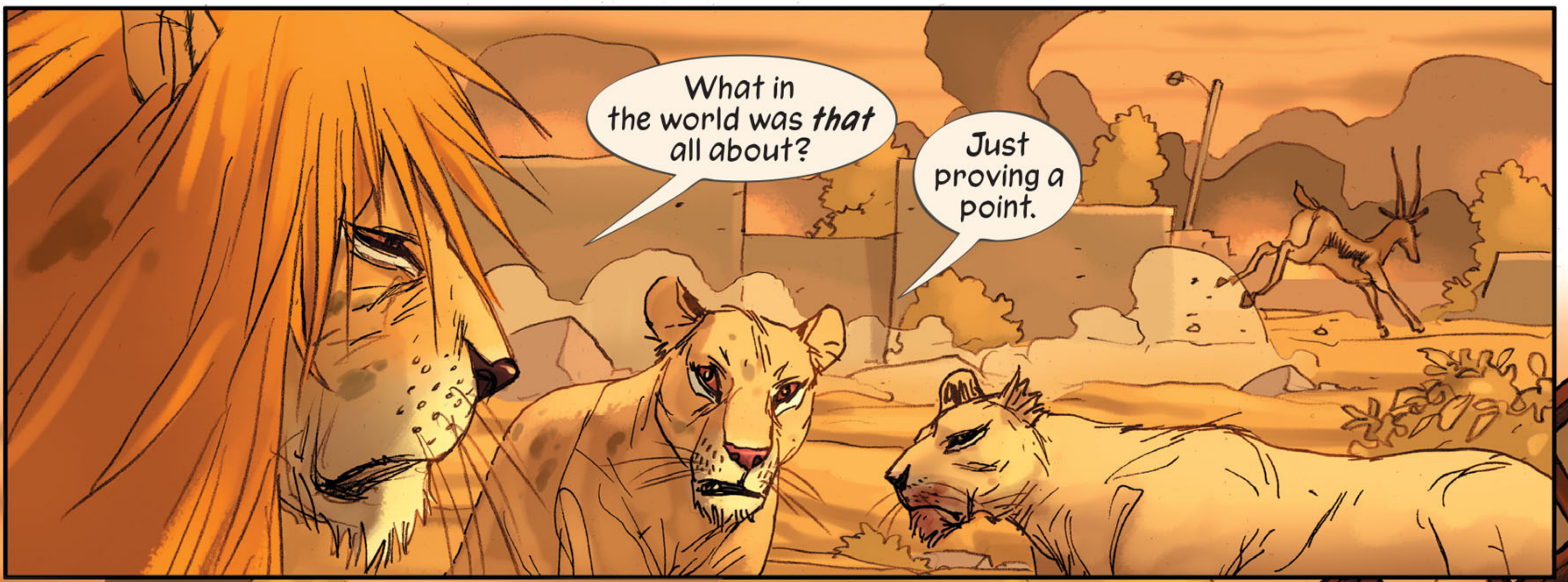
Wait.
Let her go.



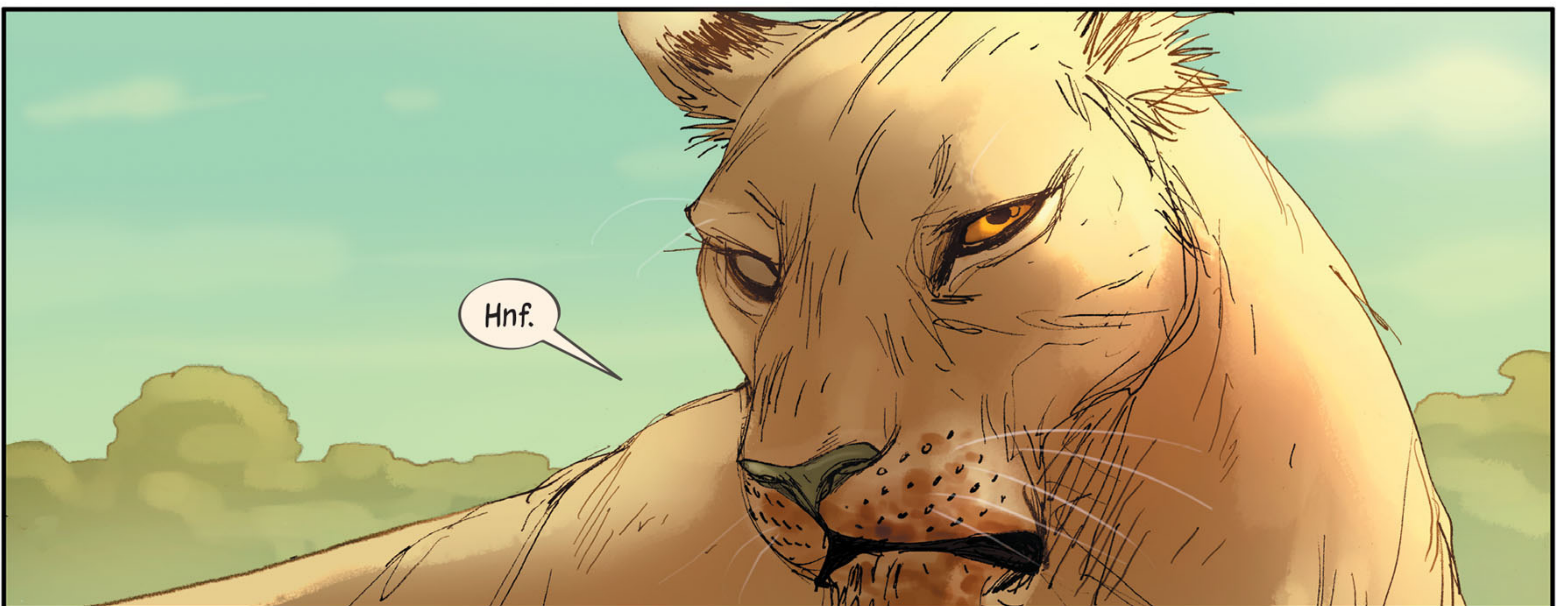
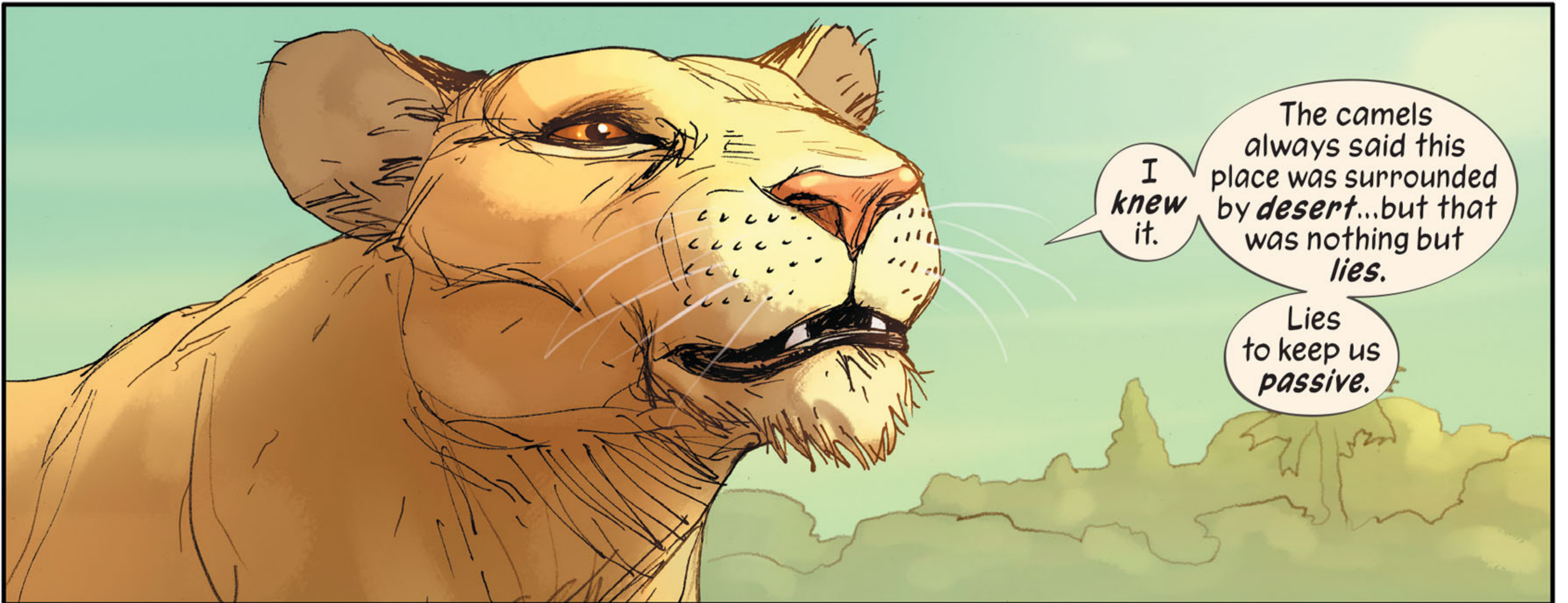
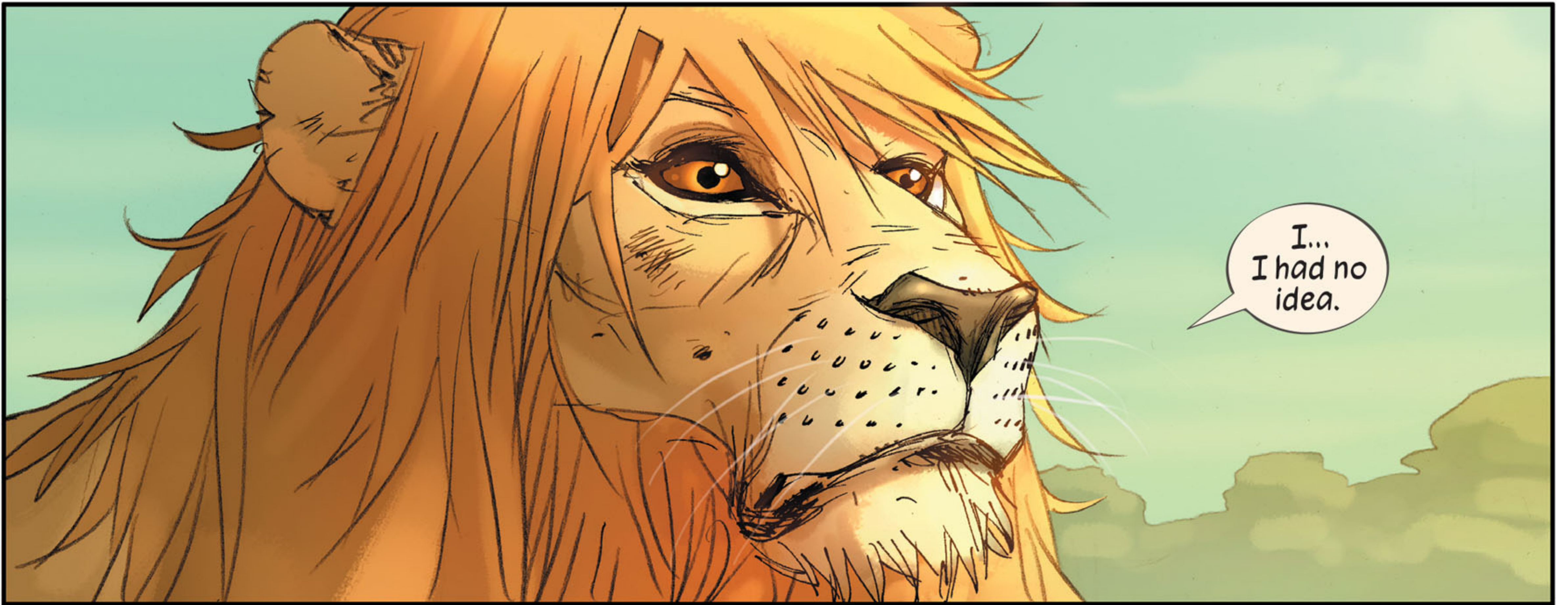
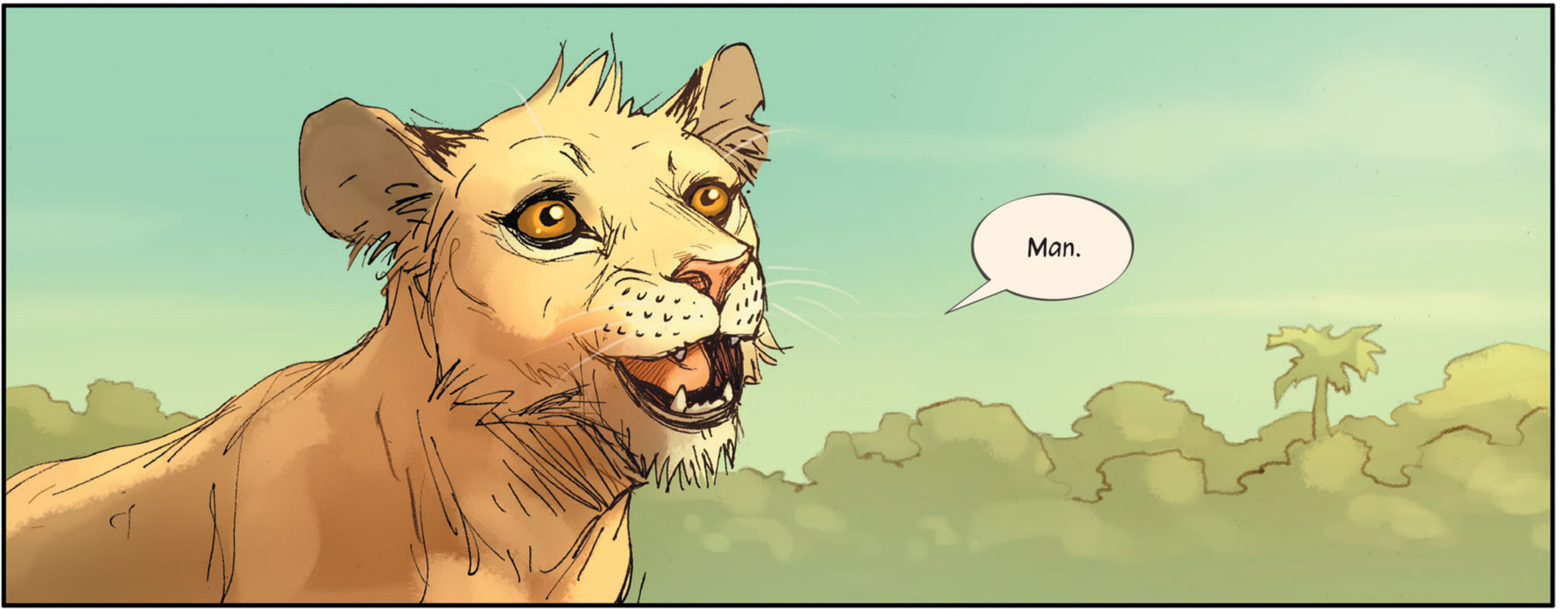
But it's an easy kill! She's lost her herd.

Then let her find them. Let her tell them that *lions* always keep their word. Let them *all* know that the antelopes could have been free *ages* ago if they had just been brave enough to *trust* me.

Now *run*, before I change my mind!









We gotta find a new den to live in, huh?

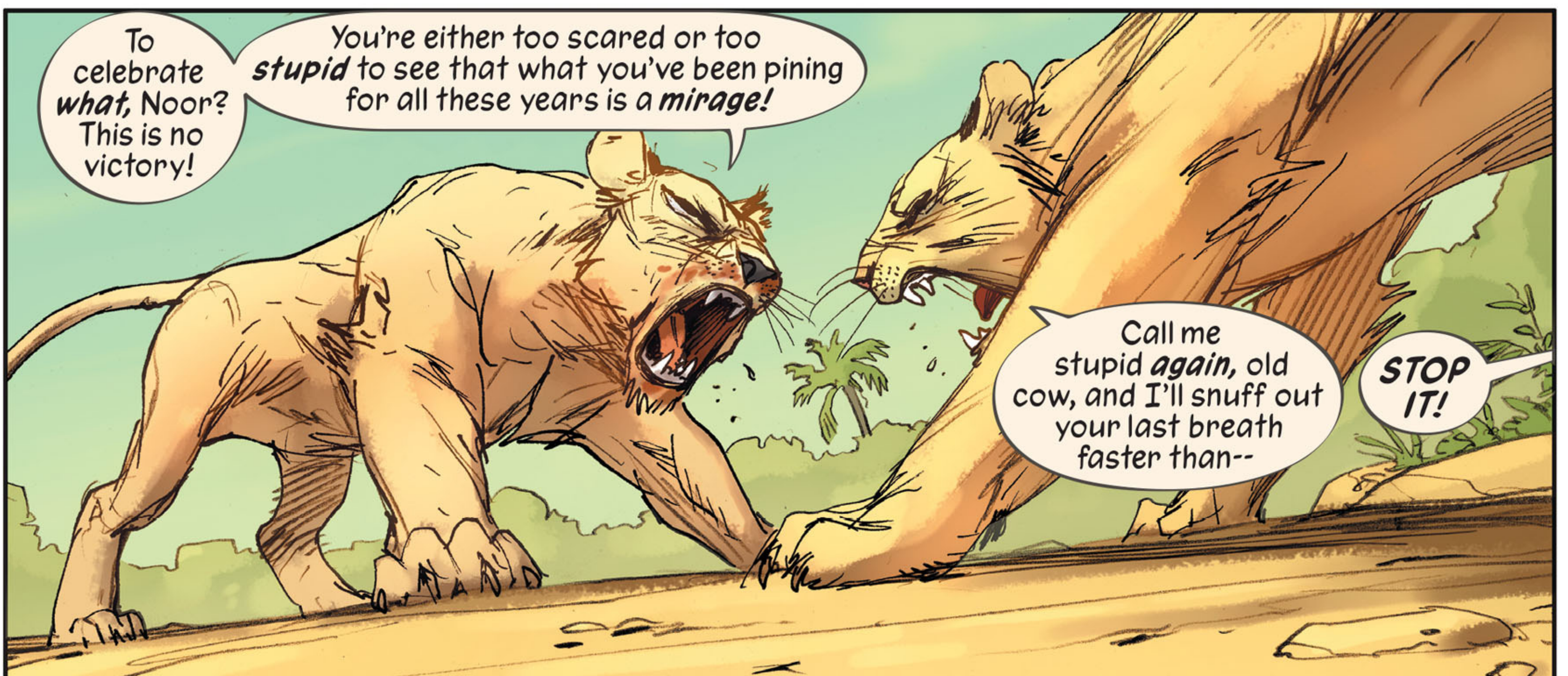
Real lions don't live in dens, Ali. We live wherever we *want*. Every tree casts its shadow for *us*.

Yes, and unless we find some real food, every blade of *grass* will be our supper.



Safa, how *long* were you a prisoner in that place?

Can't you take a single *moment* to celebrate?

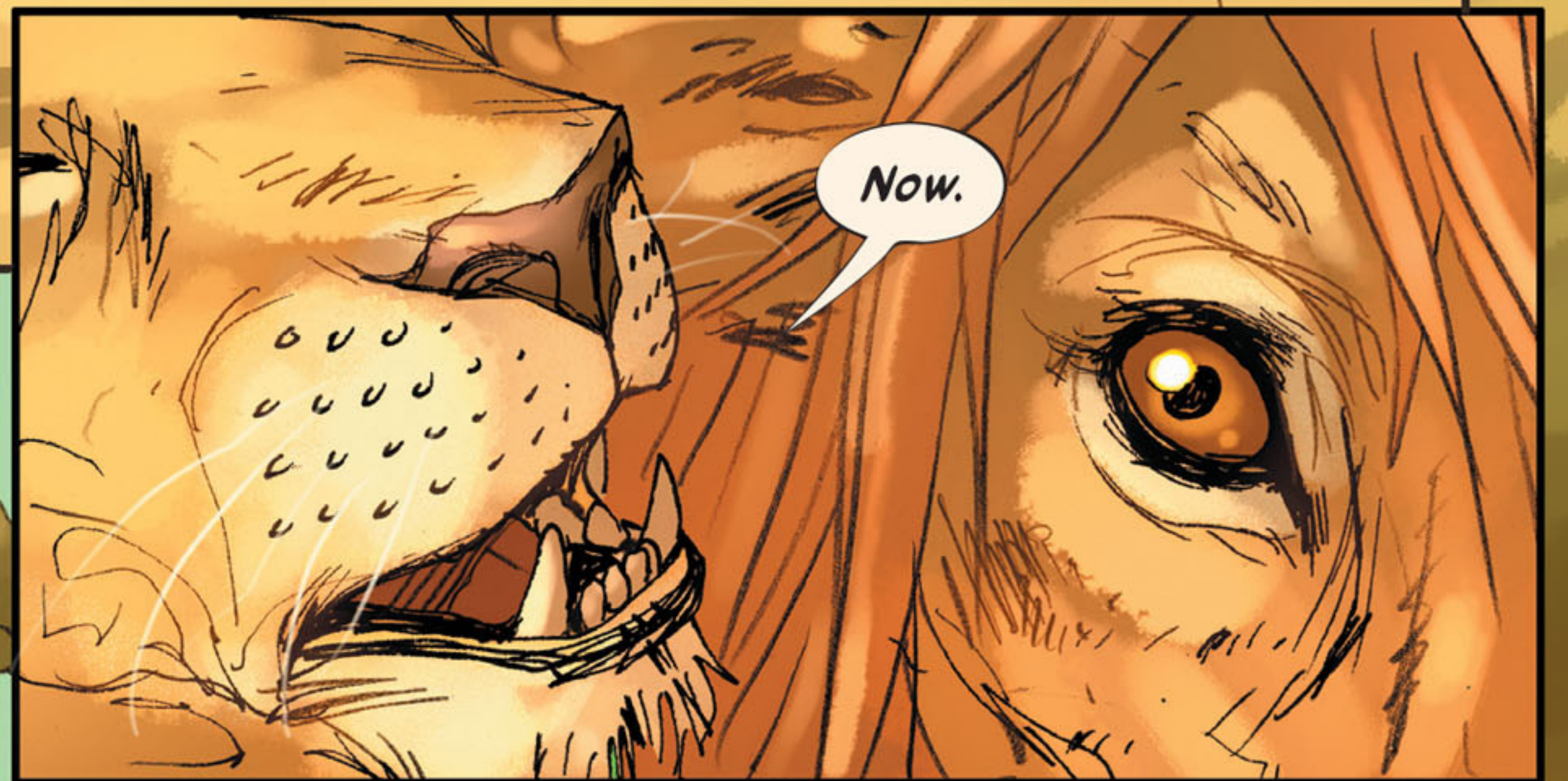
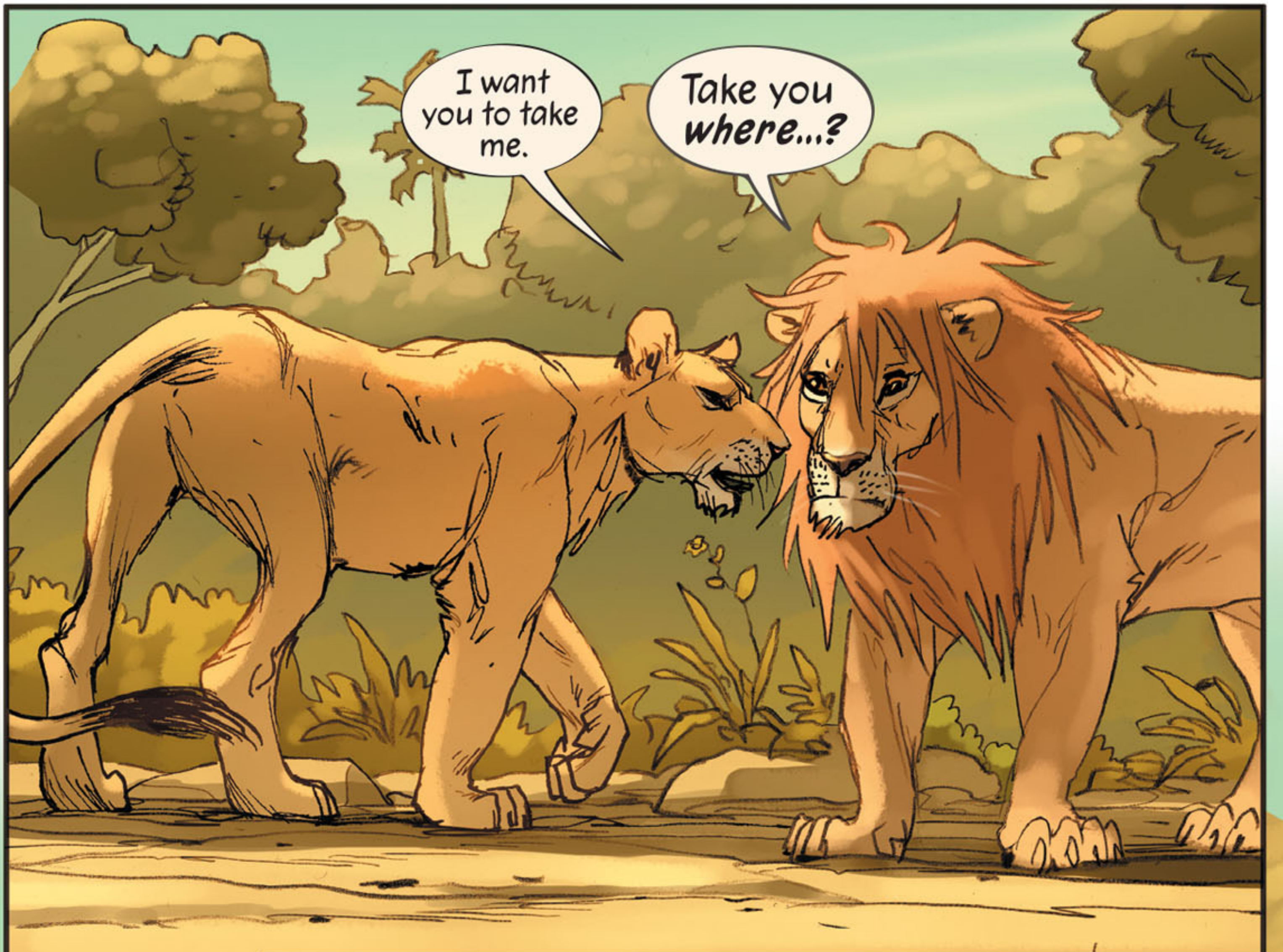
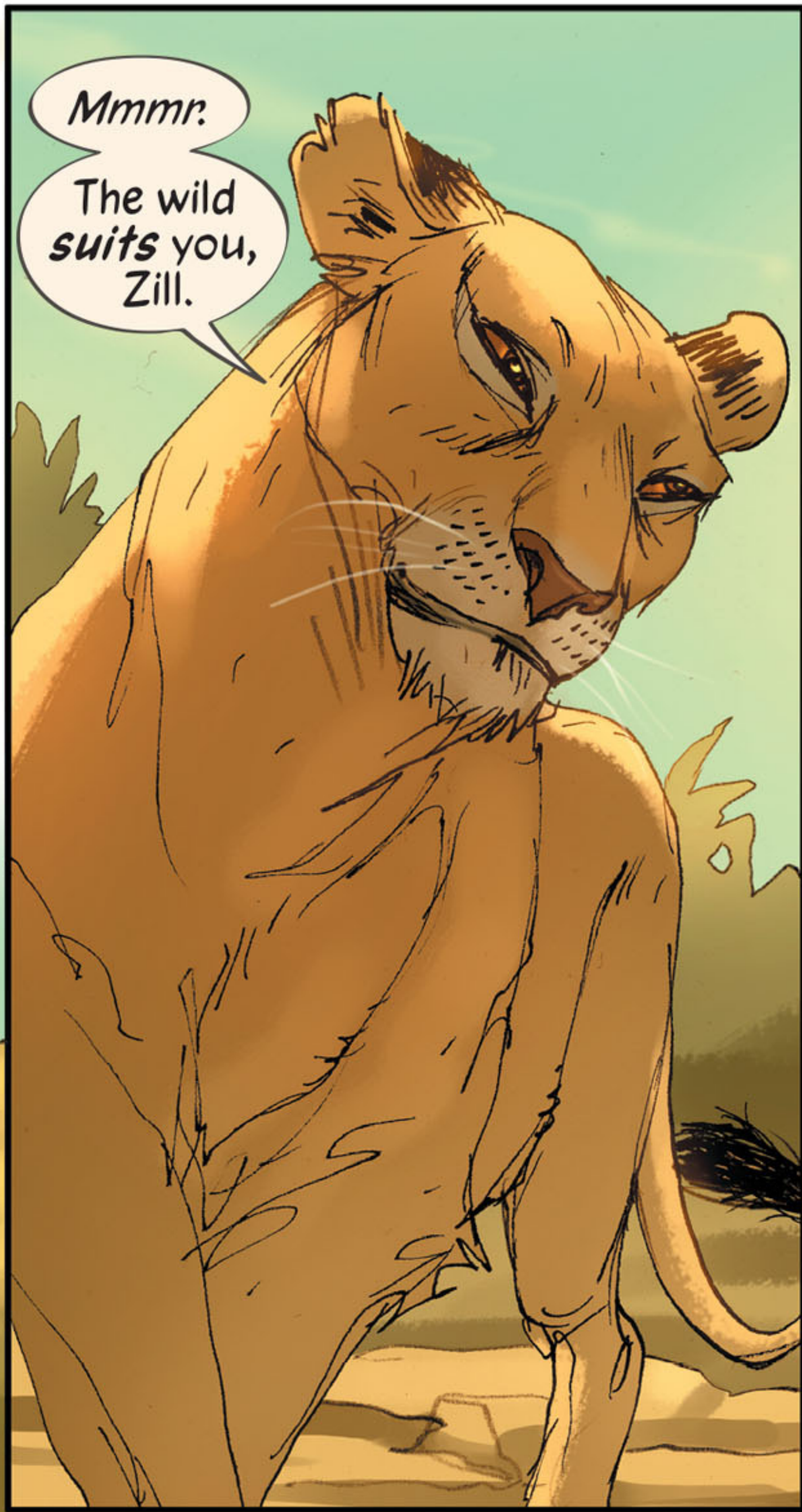
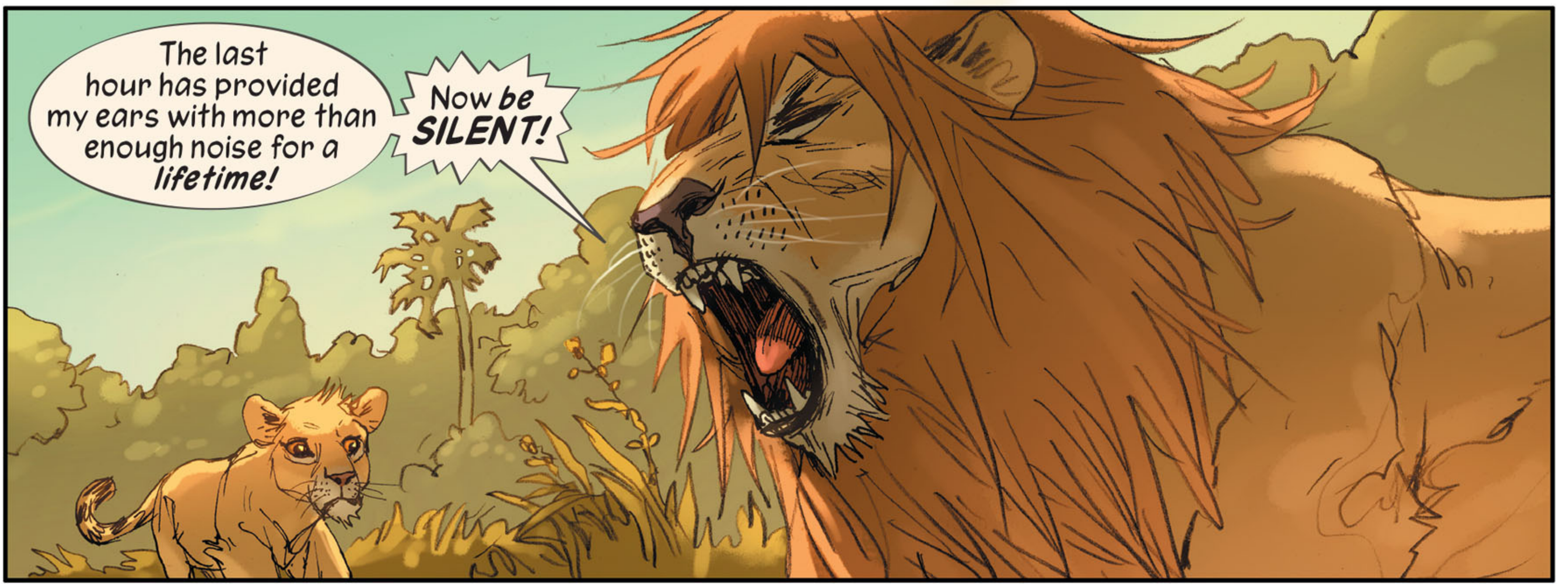


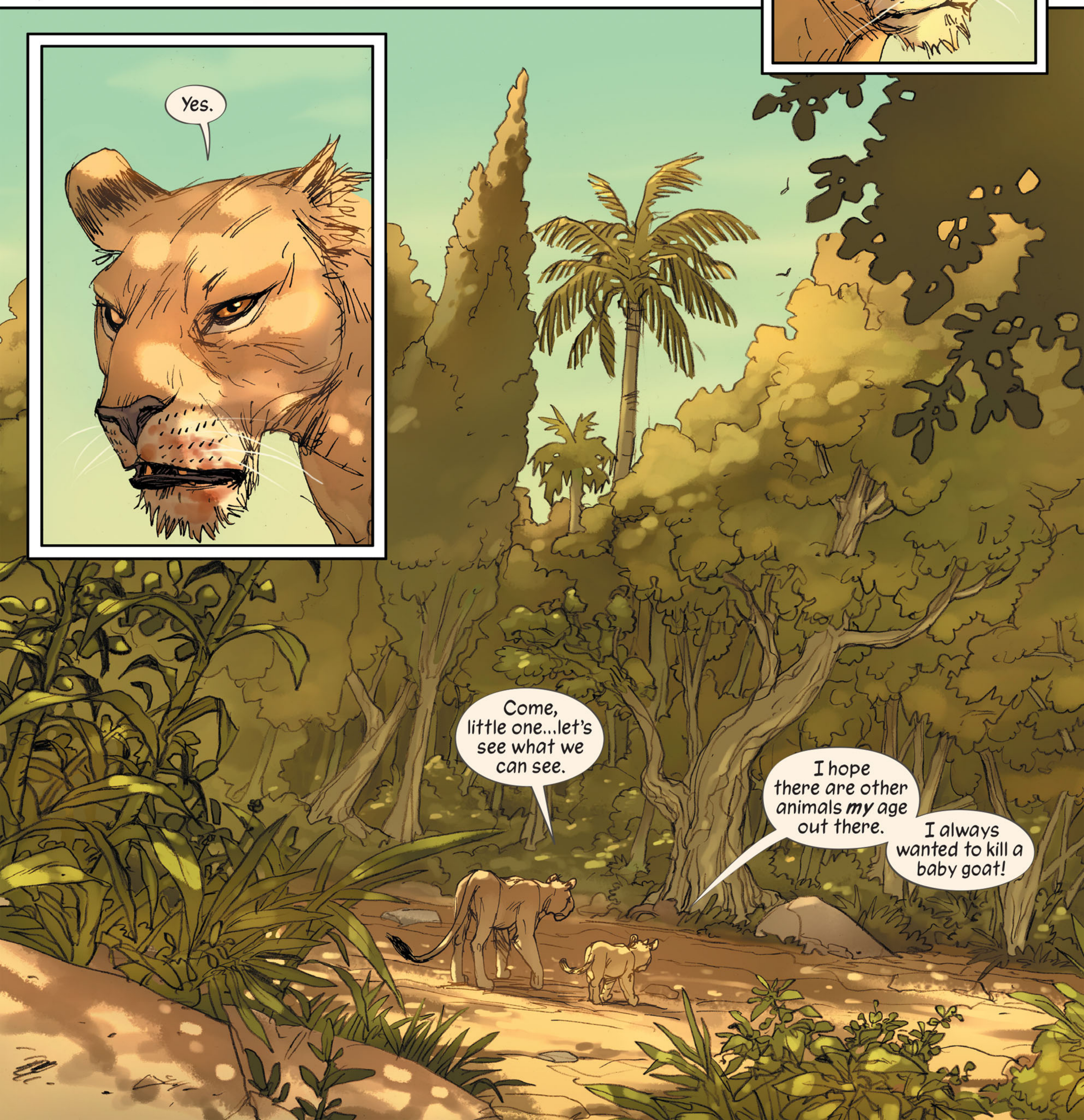
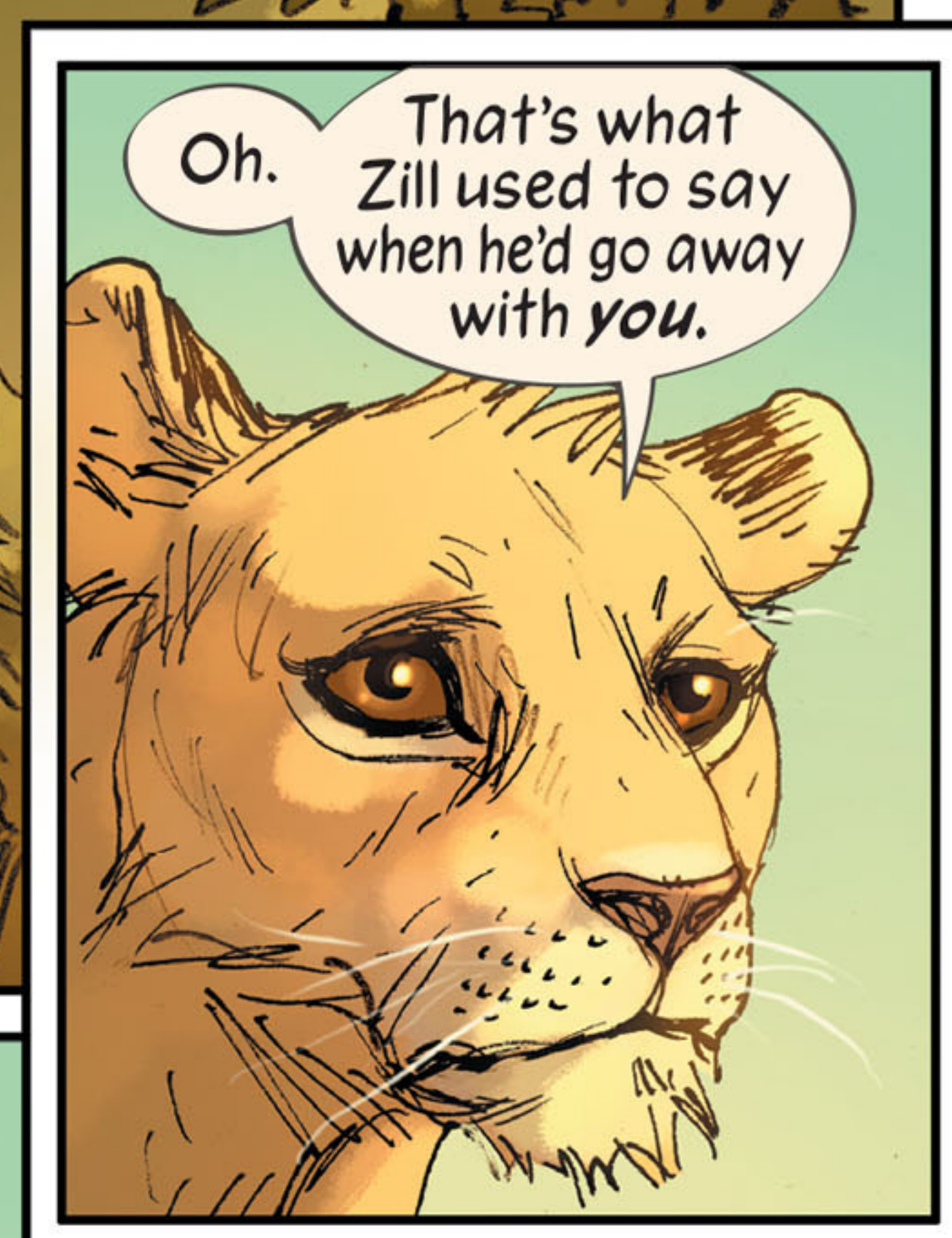
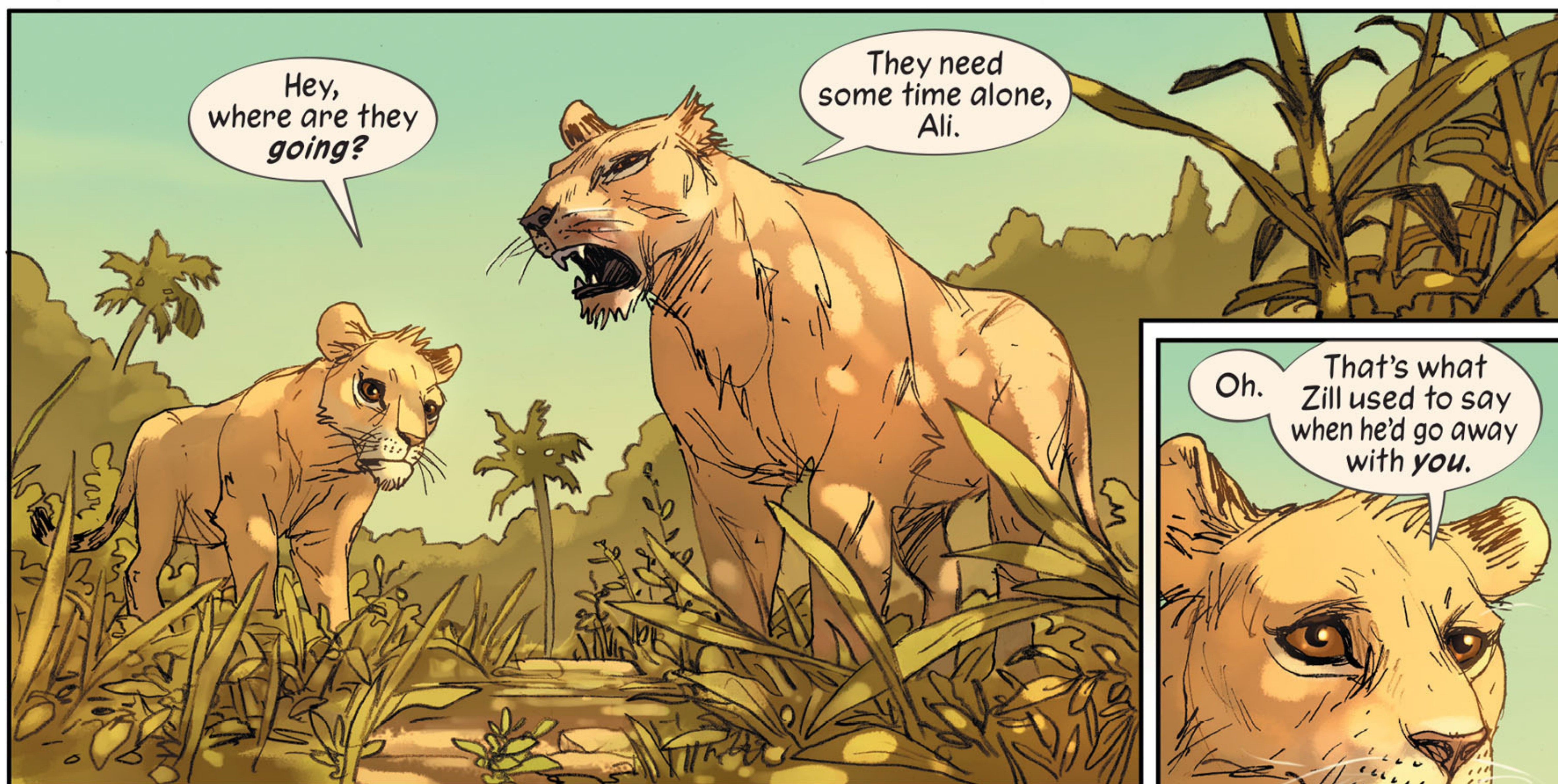
To celebrate *what*, Noor? This is no victory!

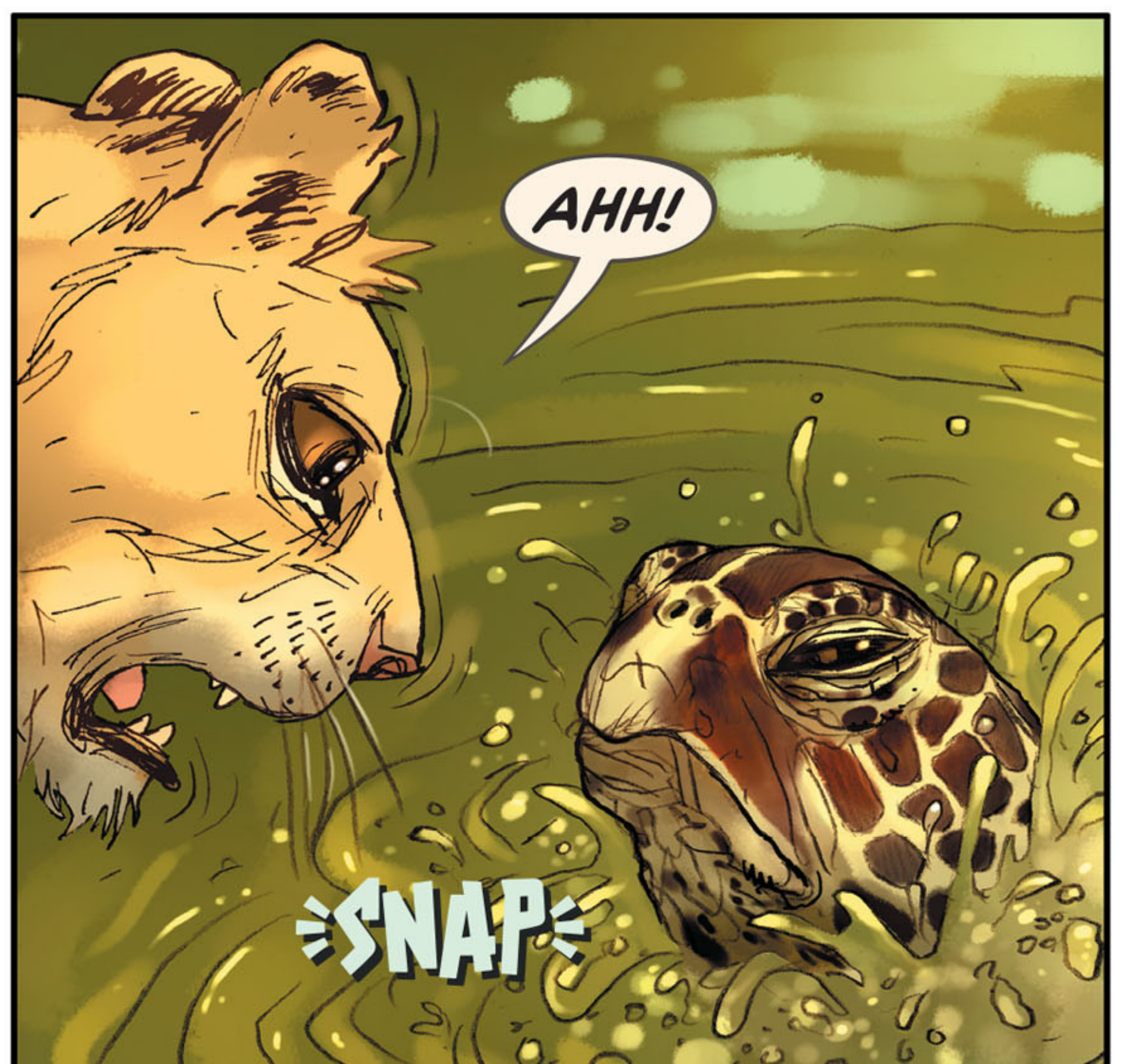
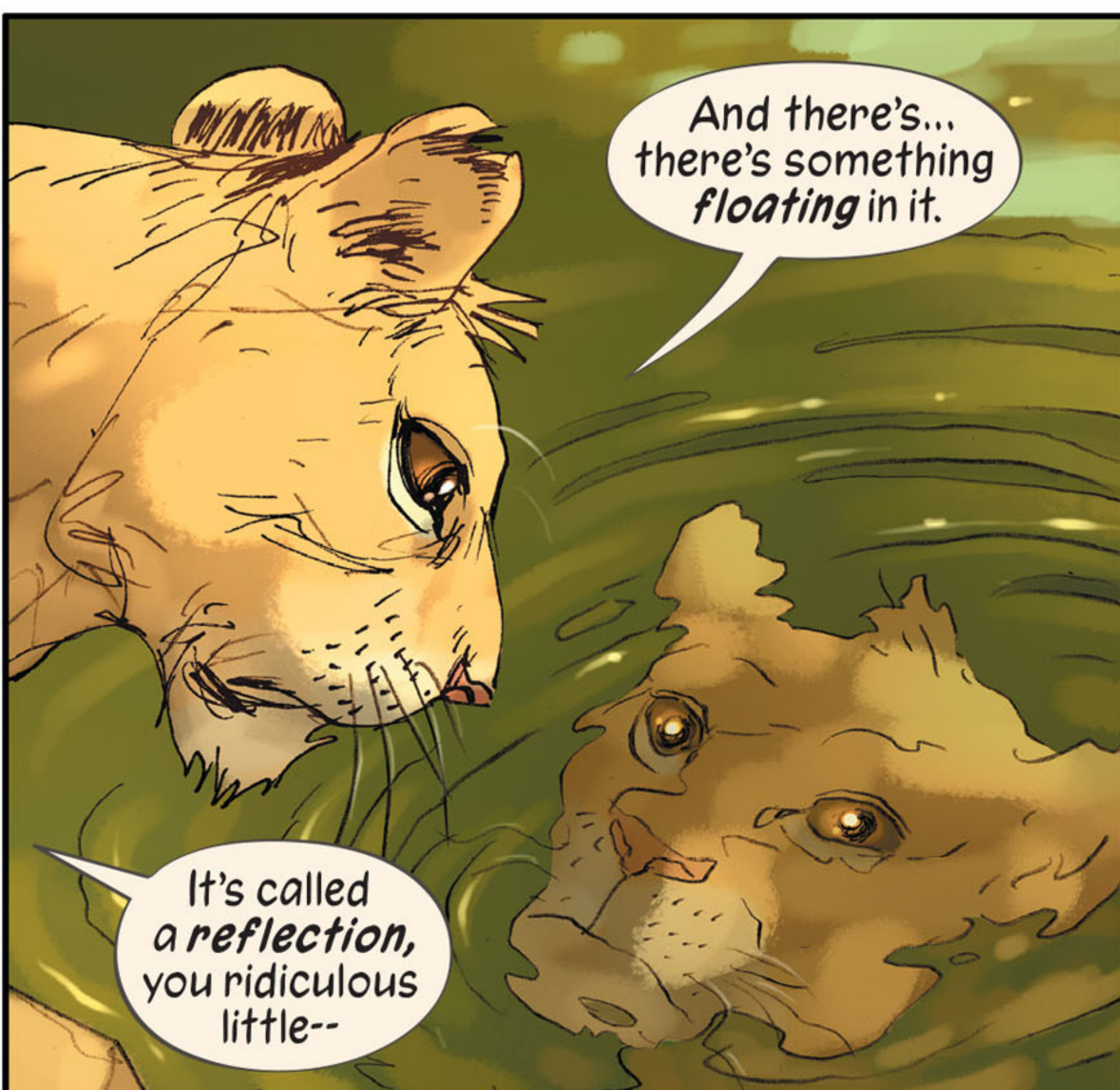
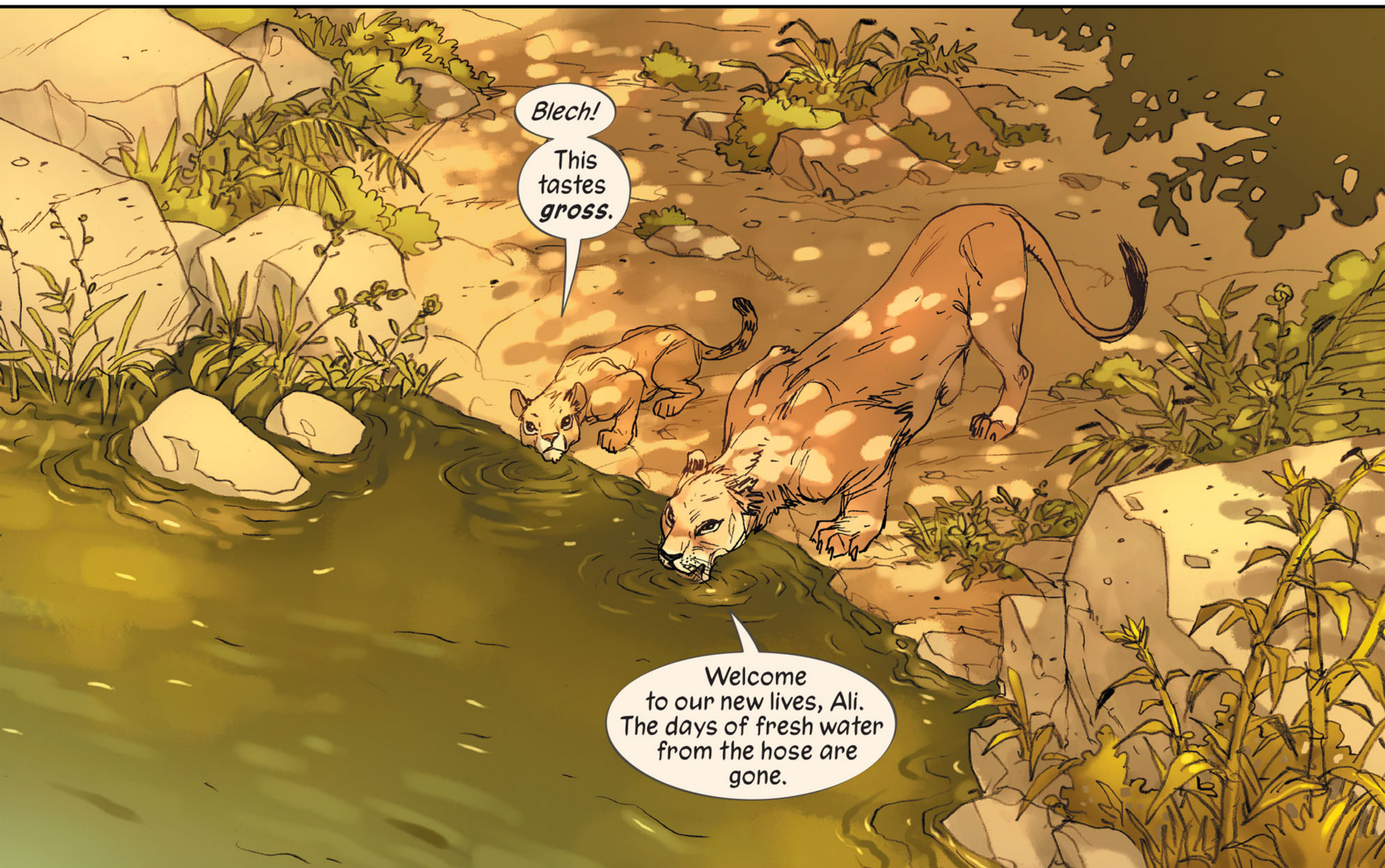
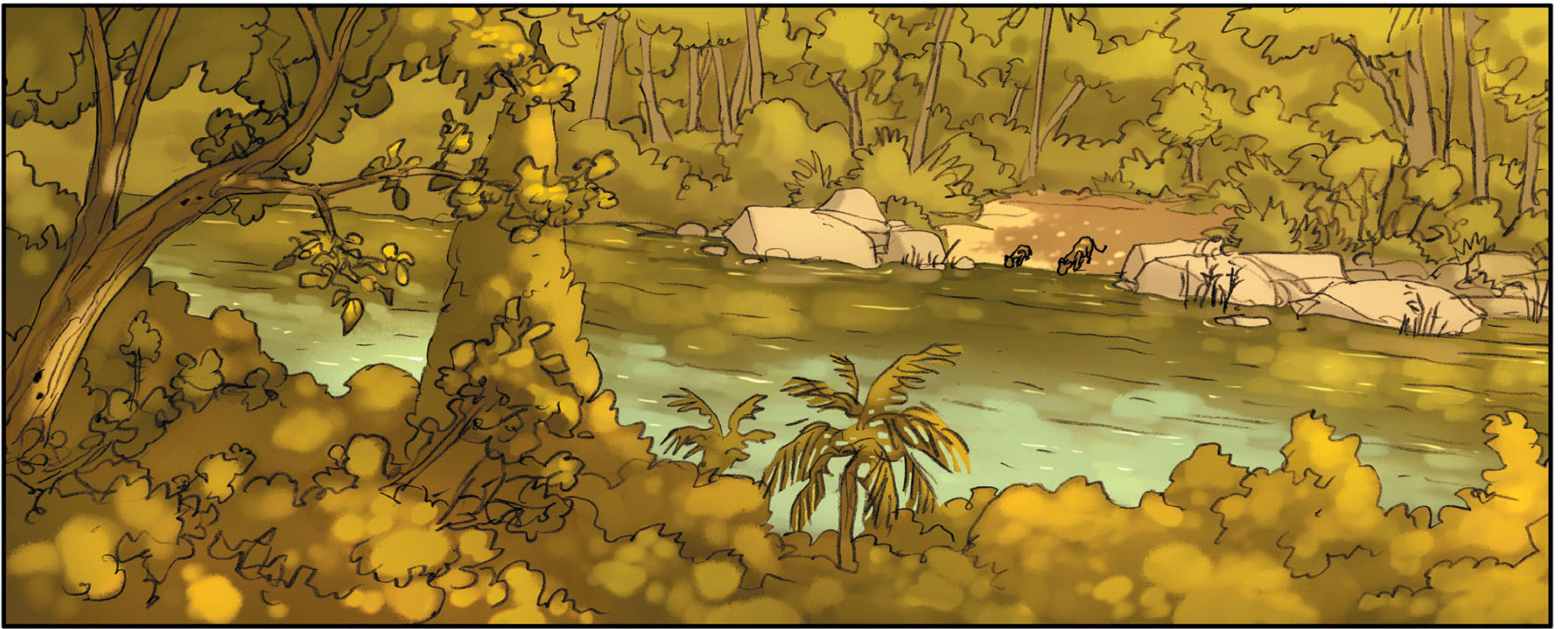
You're either too scared or too *stupid* to see that what you've been pining for all these years is a *mirage*!

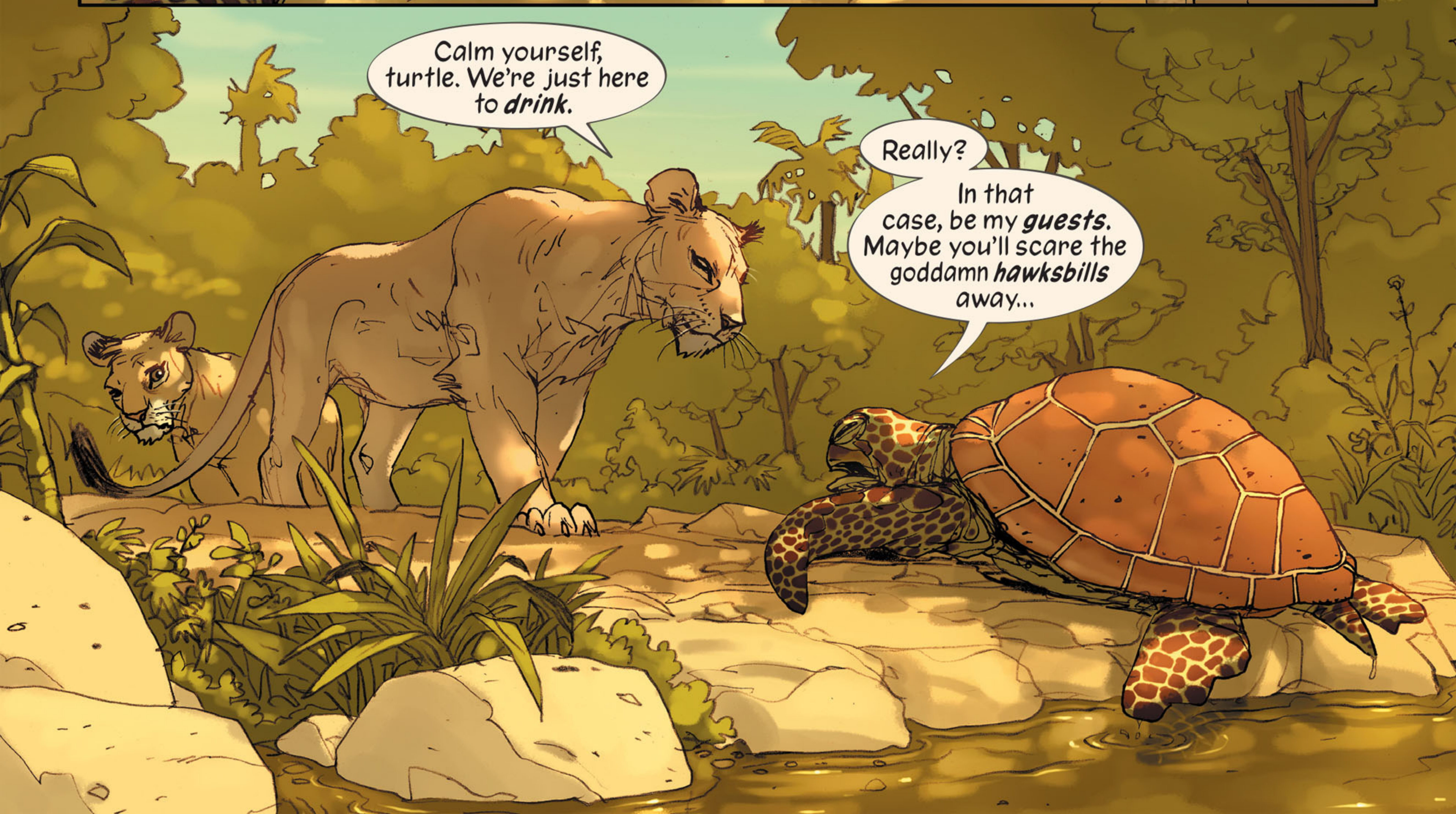
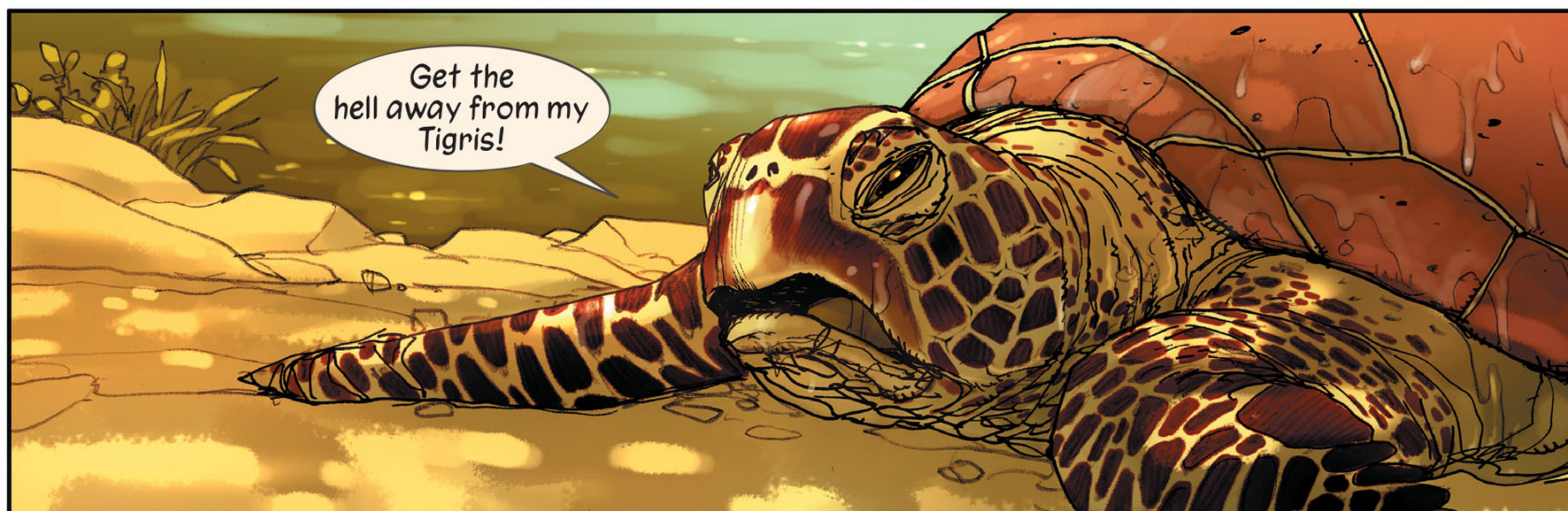
Call me stupid *again*, old cow, and I'll snuff out your last breath faster than--

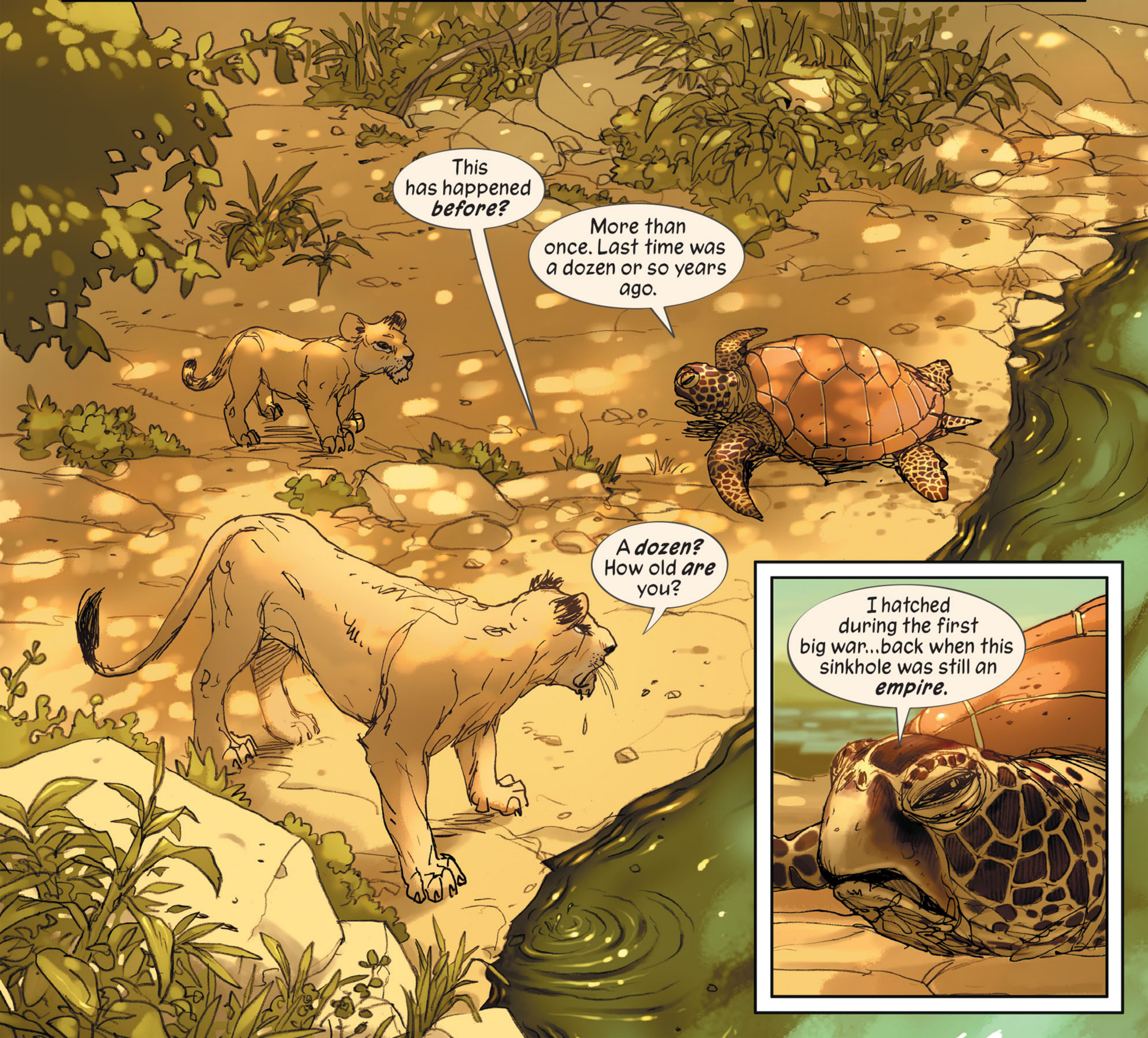
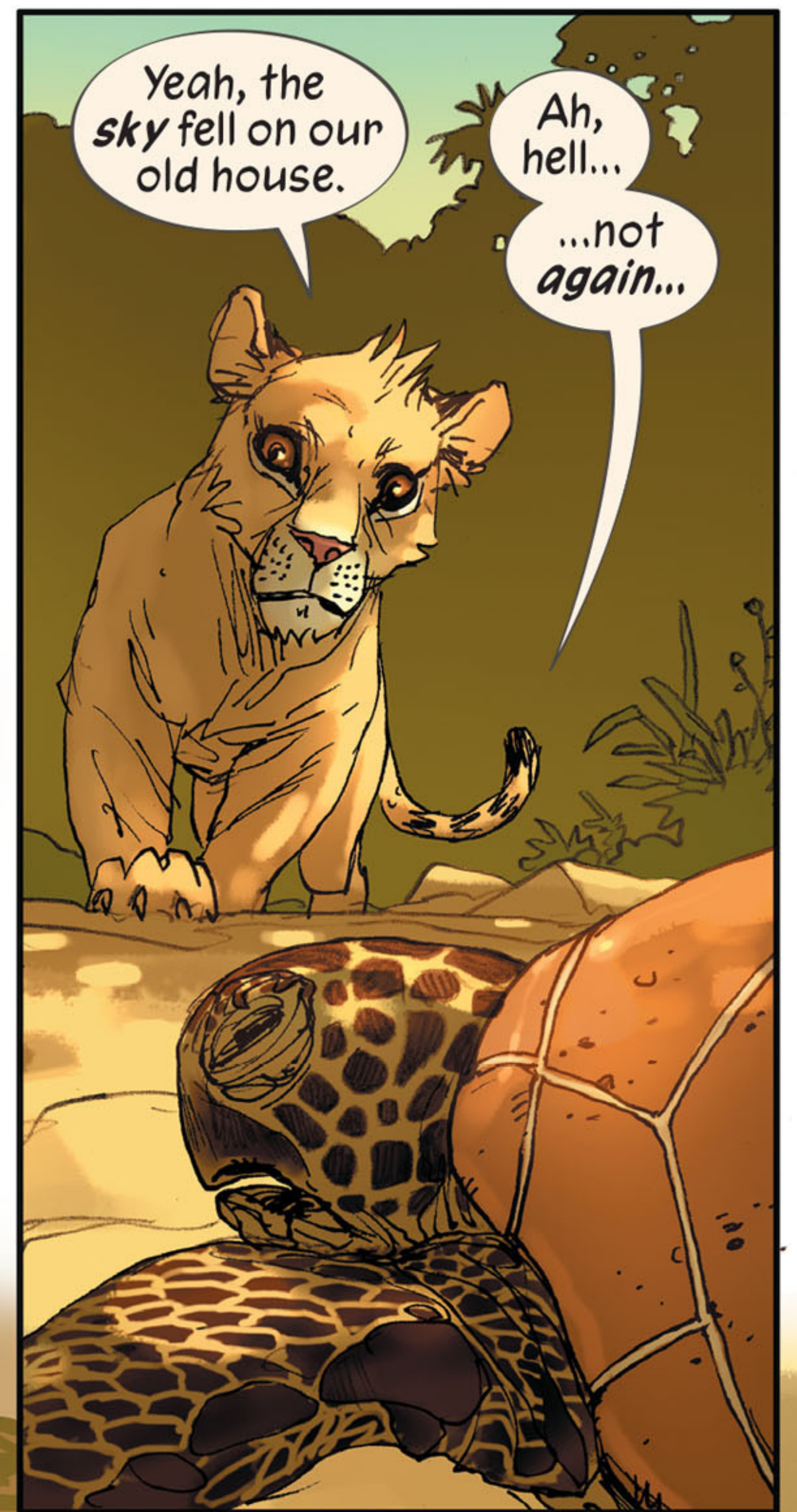
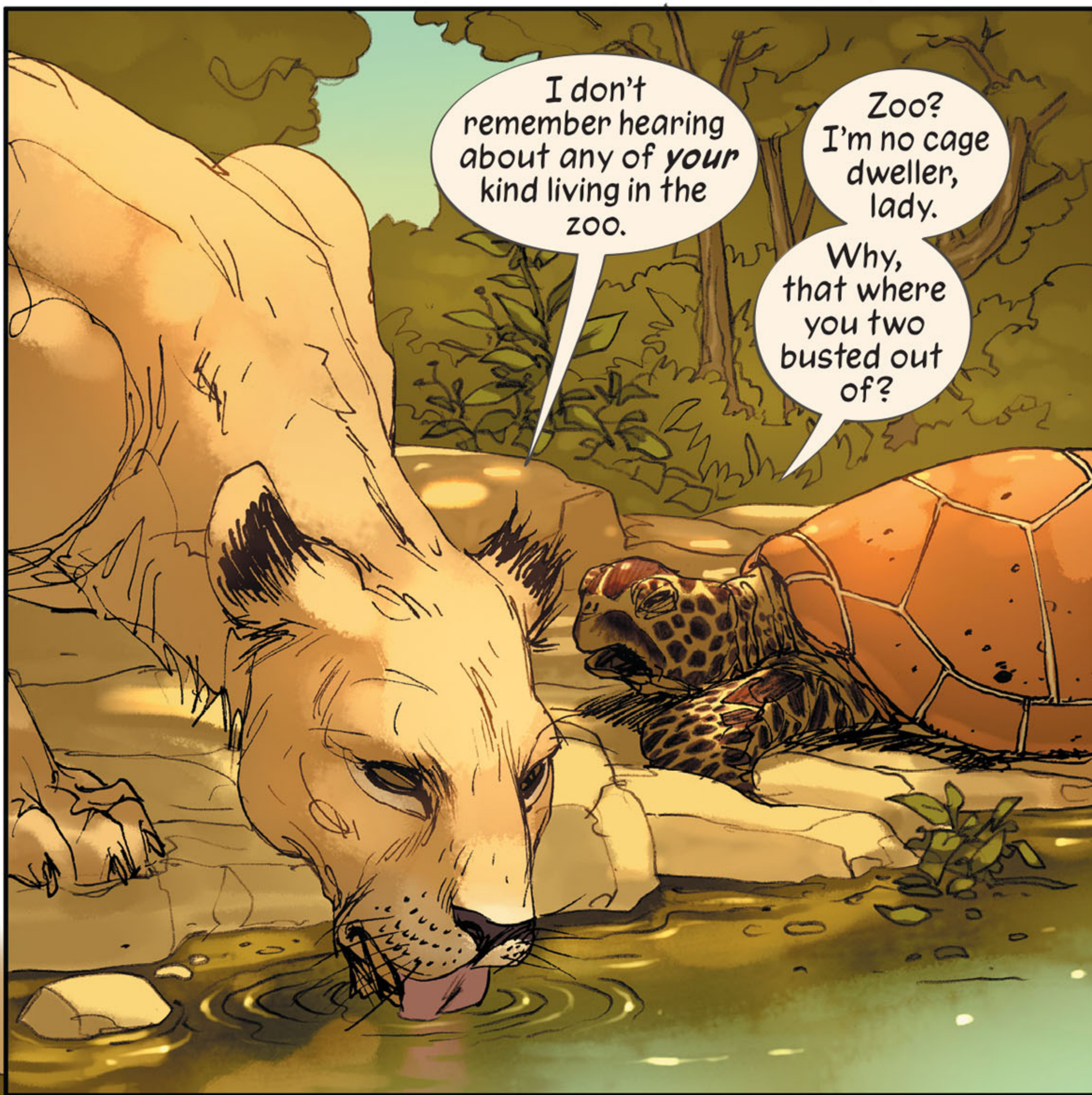
STOP IT!

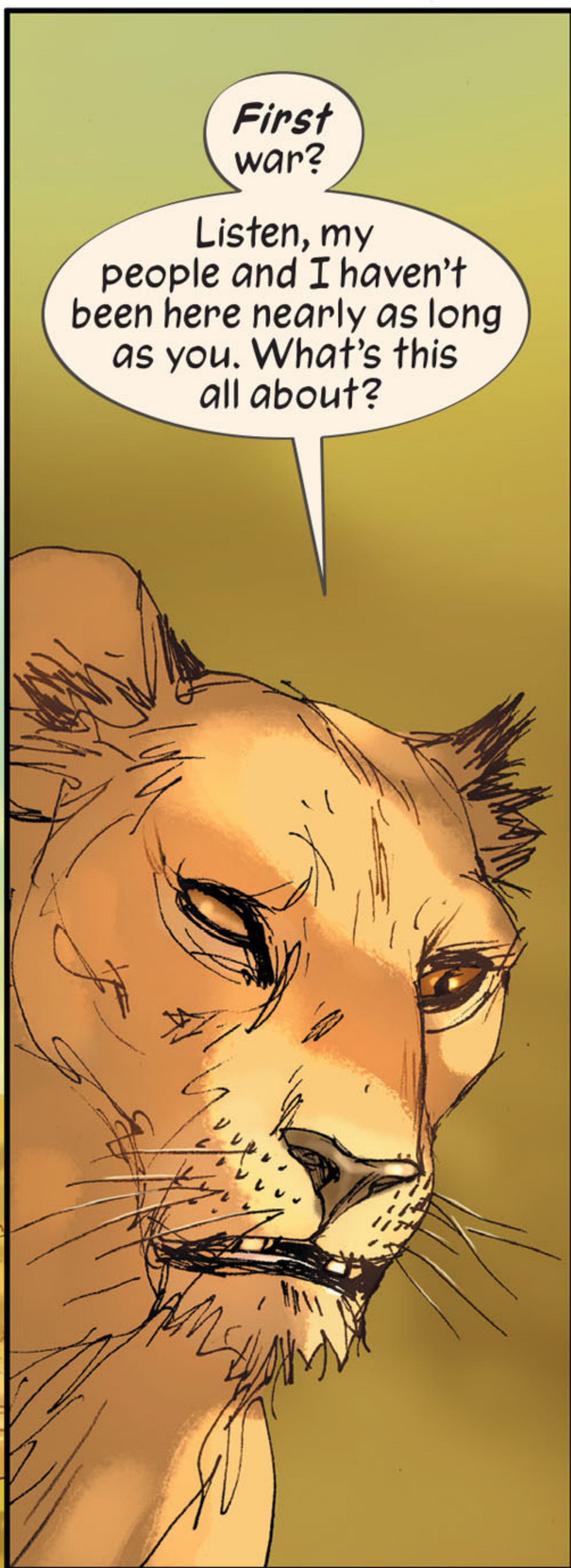






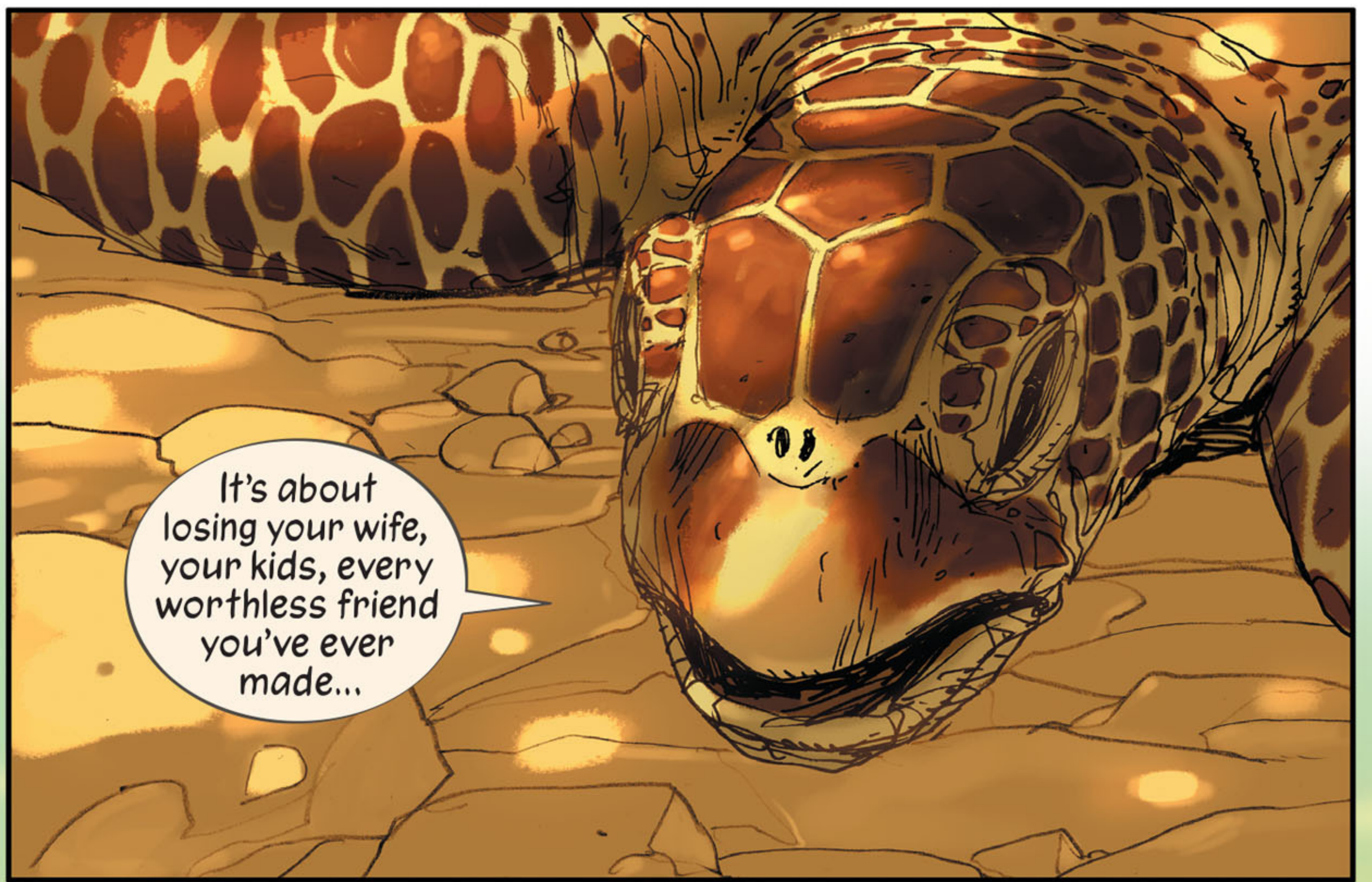




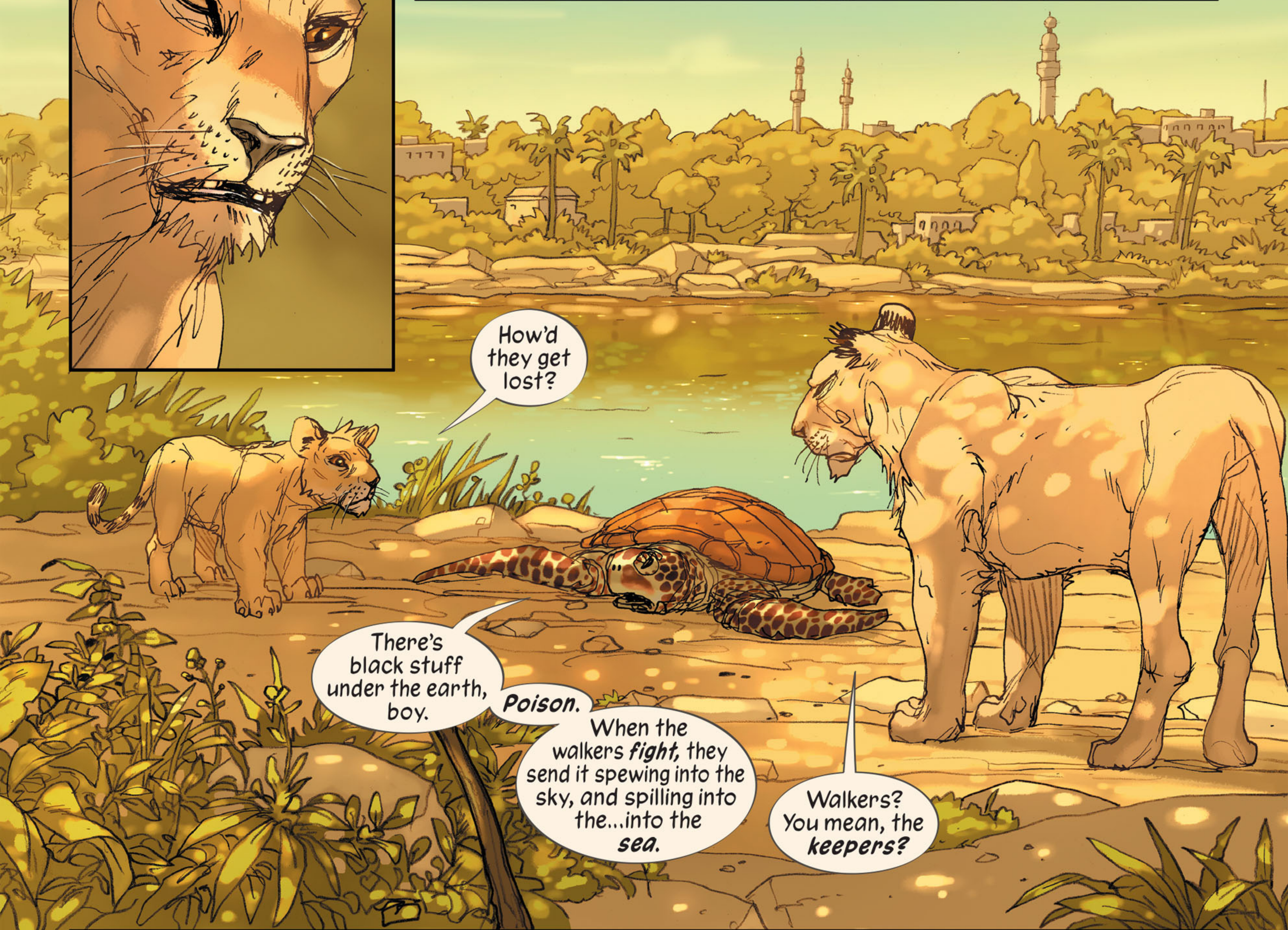


First war?

Listen, my people and I haven't been here nearly as long as you. What's this all about?



It's about losing your wife, your kids, every worthless friend you've ever made...



How'd they get lost?

There's black stuff under the earth, boy.

Poison.

When the walkers *fight*, they send it spewing into the sky, and spilling into the...into the *sea*.

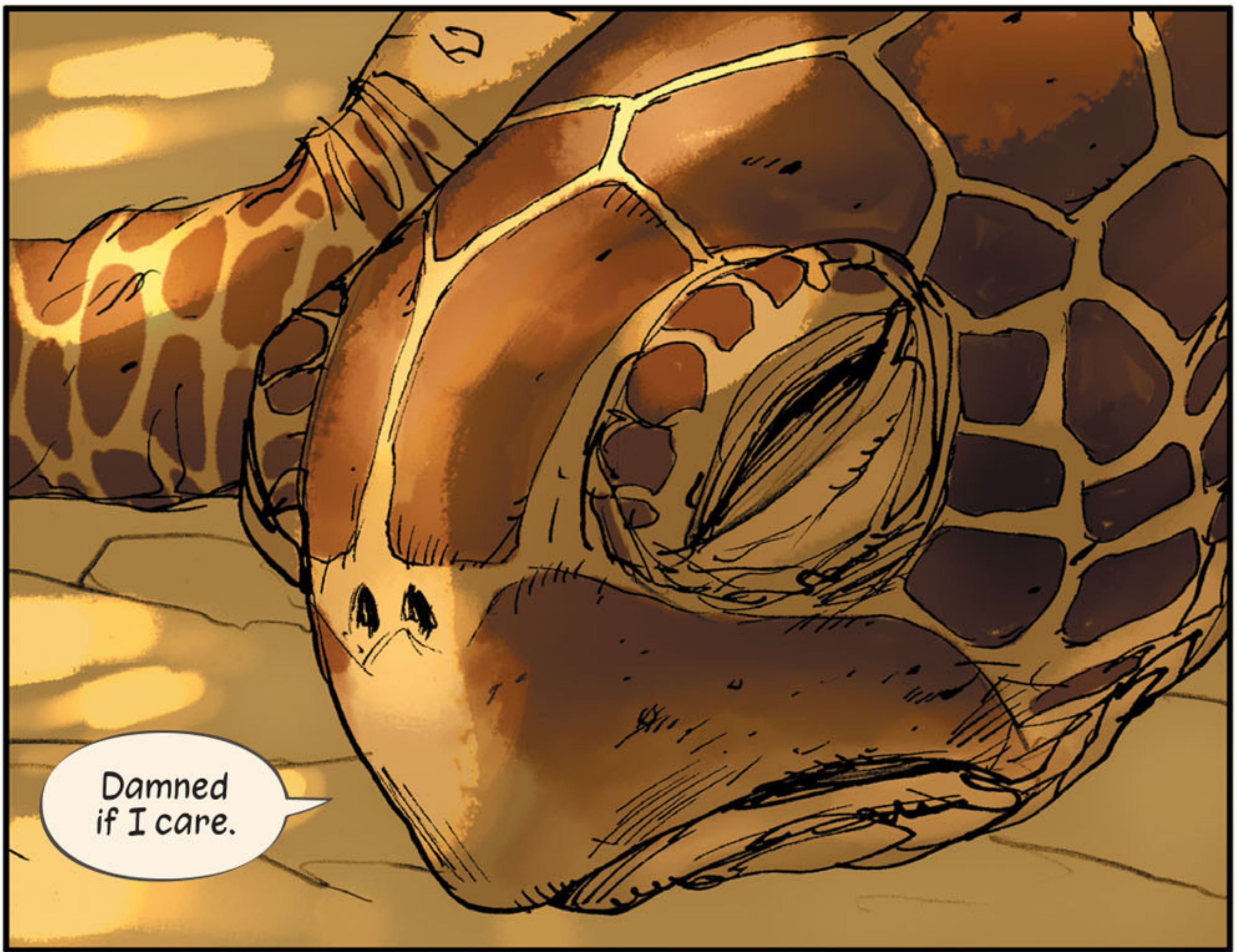
Walkers? You mean, the *keepers*?



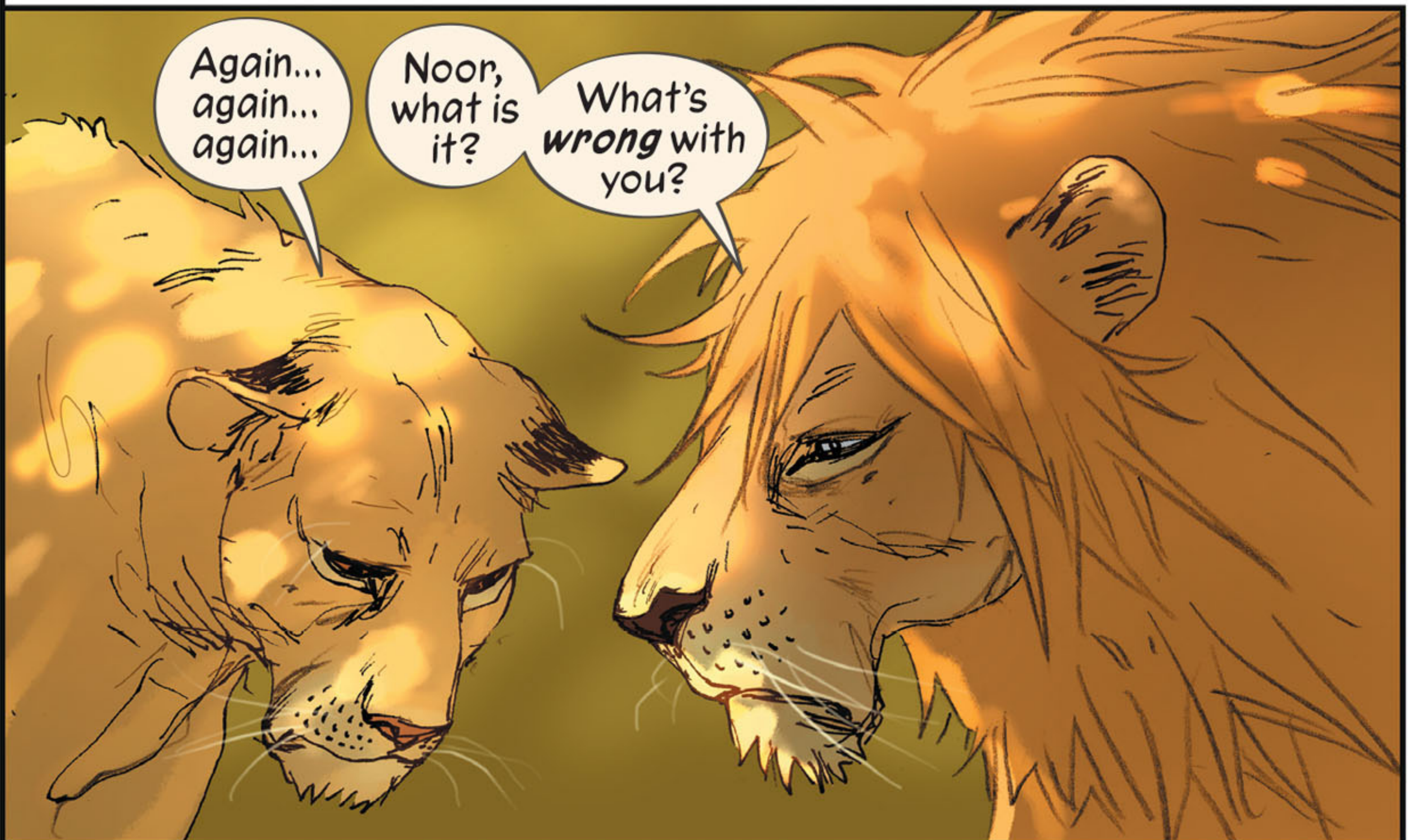
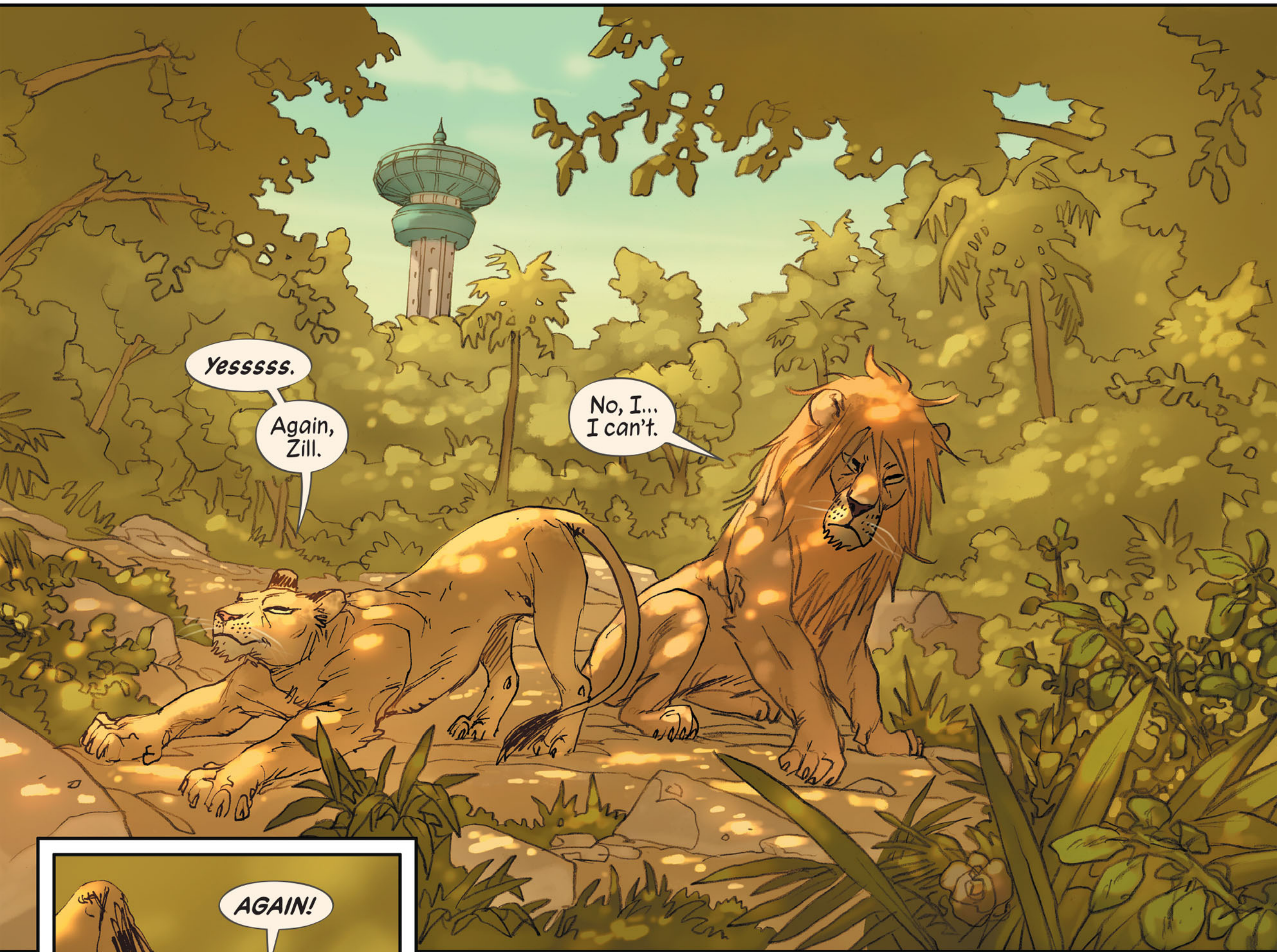
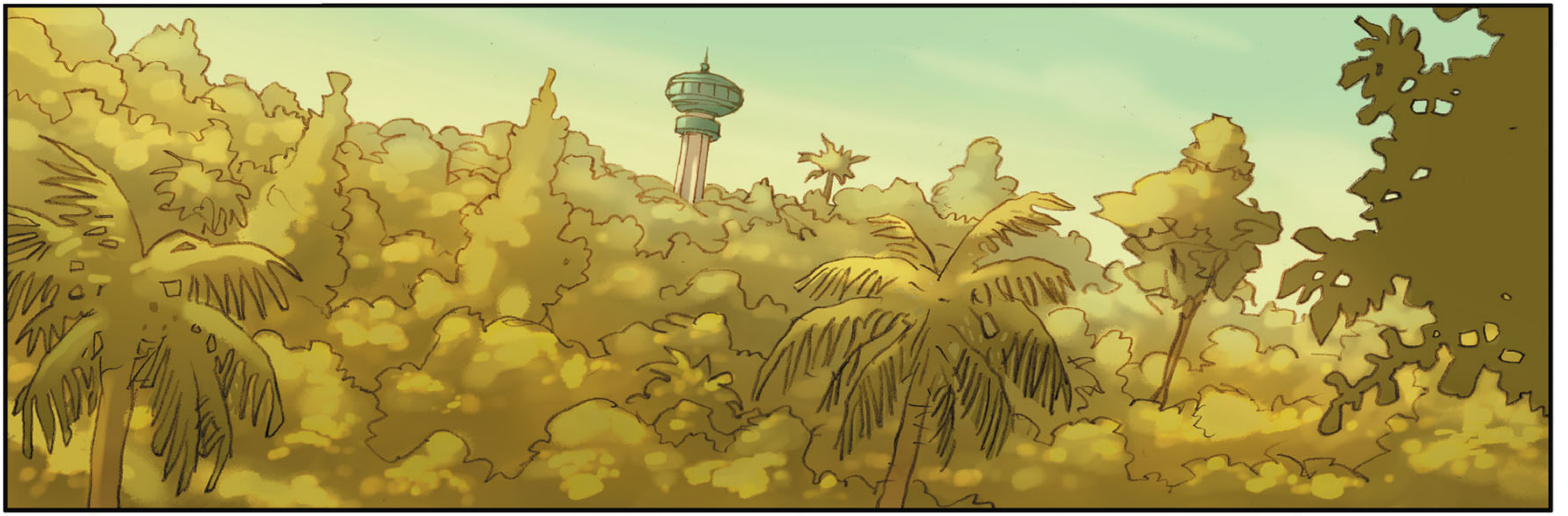
Keepers, two-leggers, *Man*... don't matter what you call 'em, they're *all* the same.

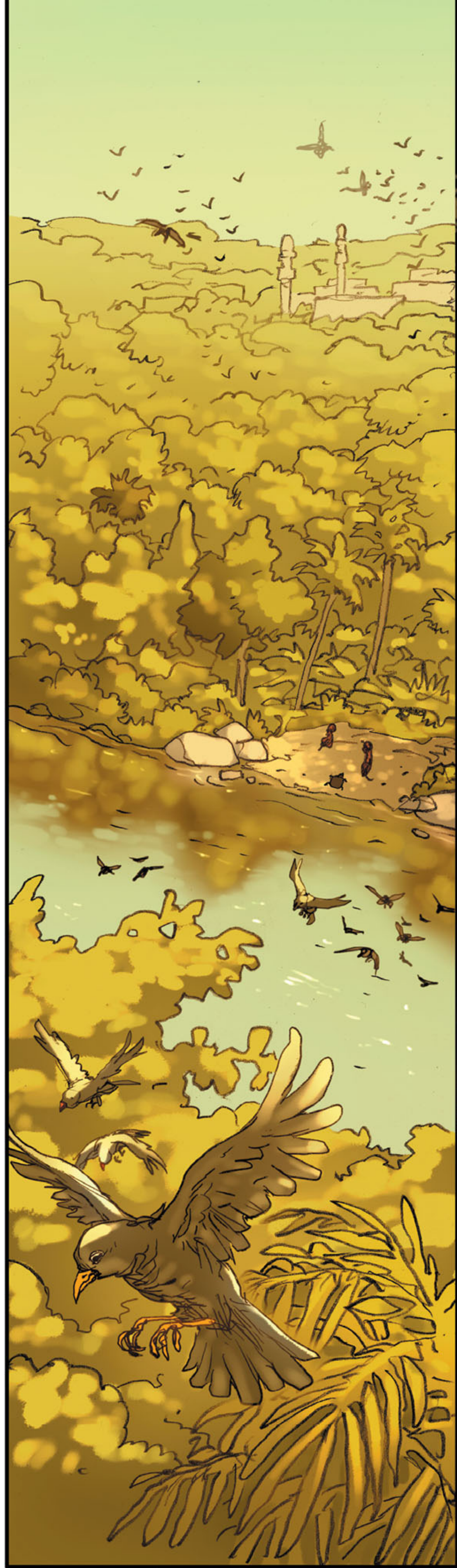
What are they fighting about?

Damned if I know, son...



Damned
if I care.

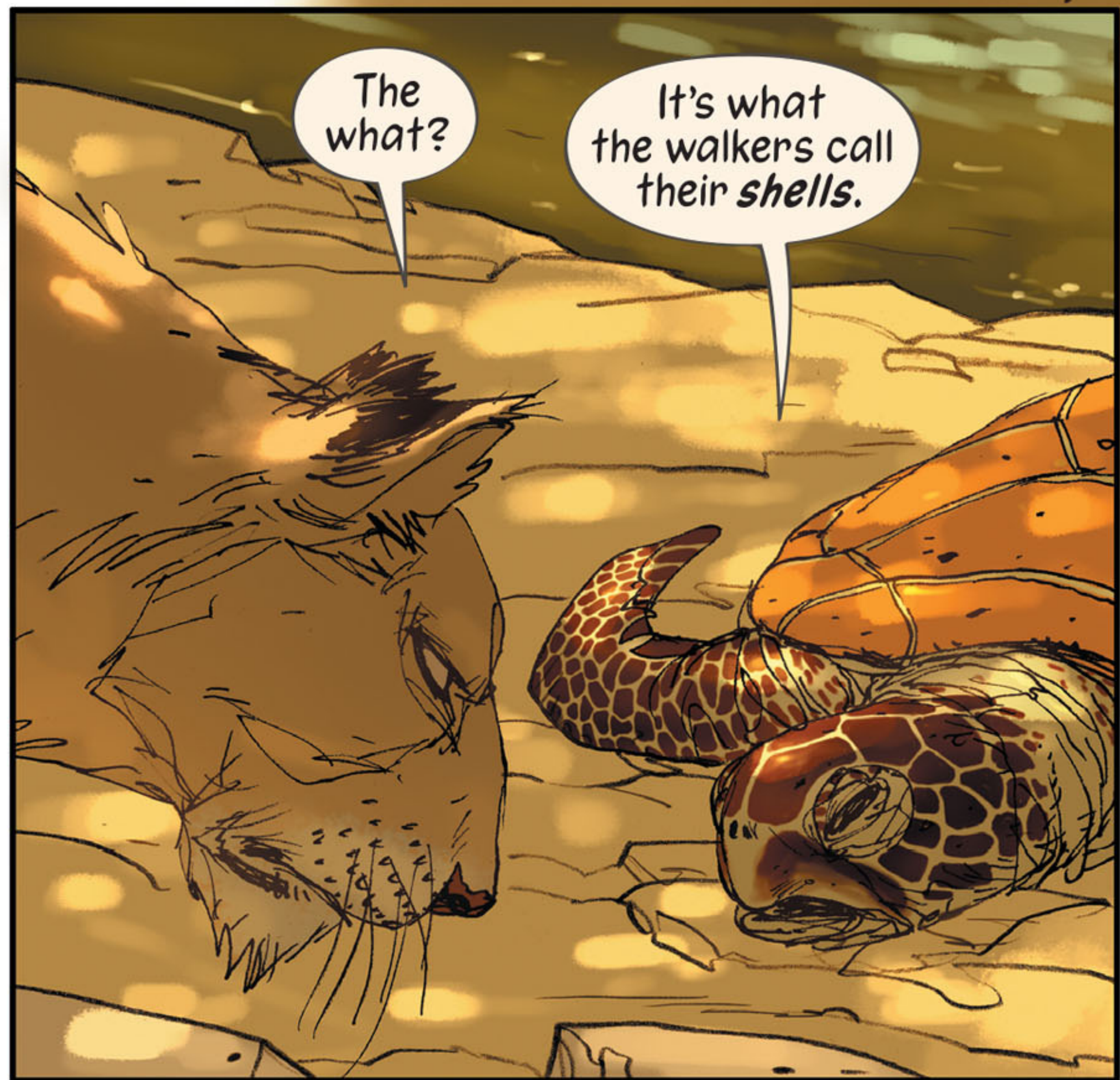




What *was* that, Safa?

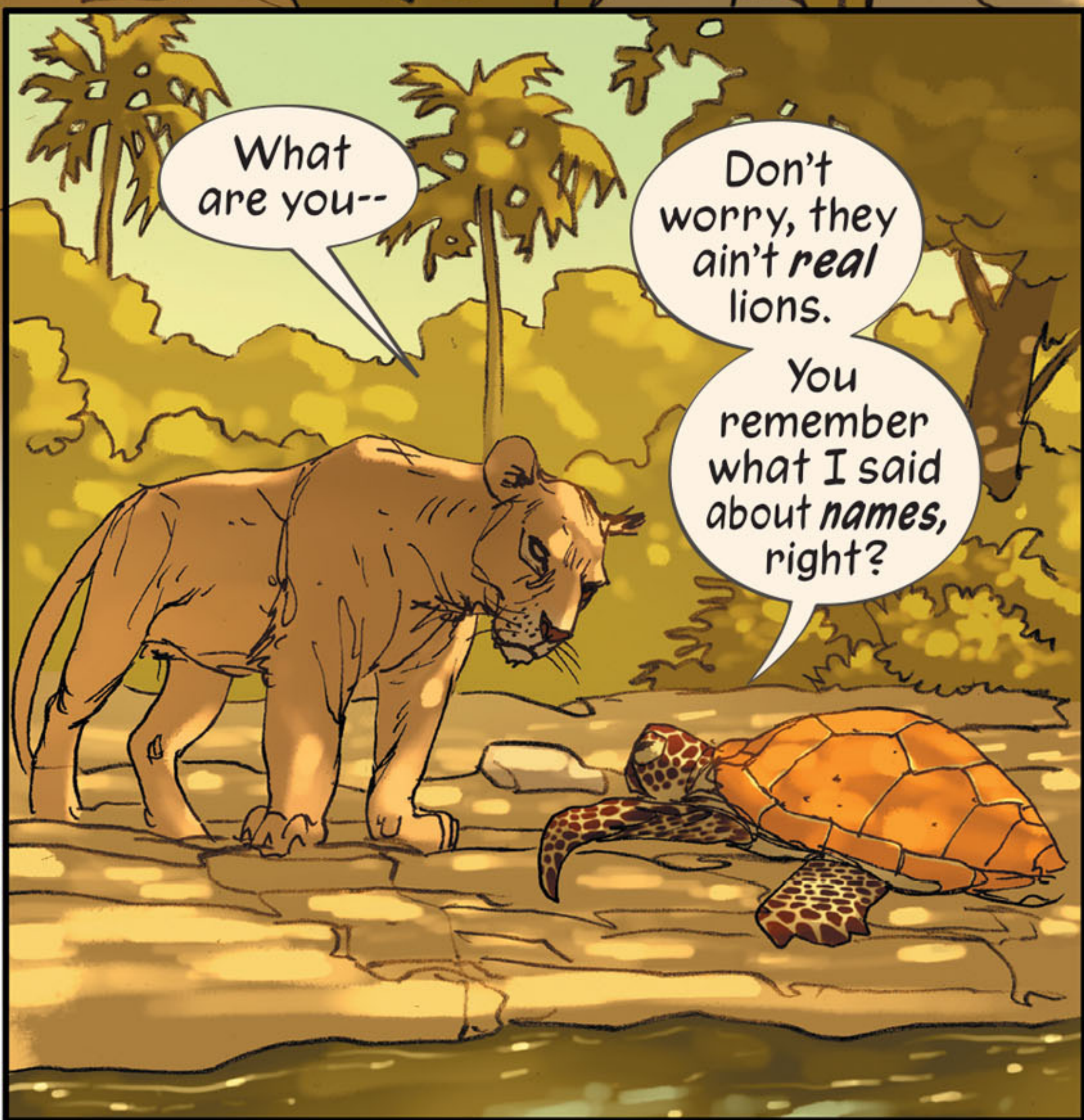
Sounded like a...a *stomach* rumbling. A *big* stomach.

Those'll be the Lions of Babylon.



The what?

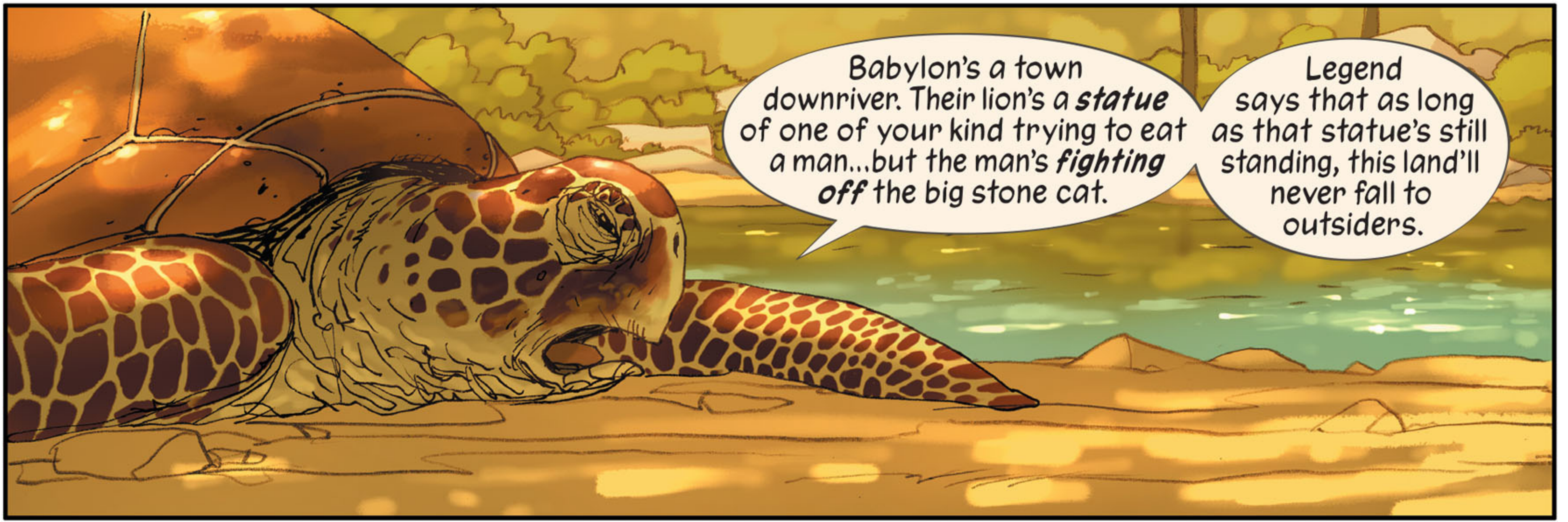
It's what the walkers call their *shells*.



What are you--

Don't worry, they ain't *real* lions.

You remember what I said about *names*, right?



Babylon's a town downriver. Their lion's a *statue* of one of your kind trying to eat a man...but the man's *fighting off* the big stone cat.

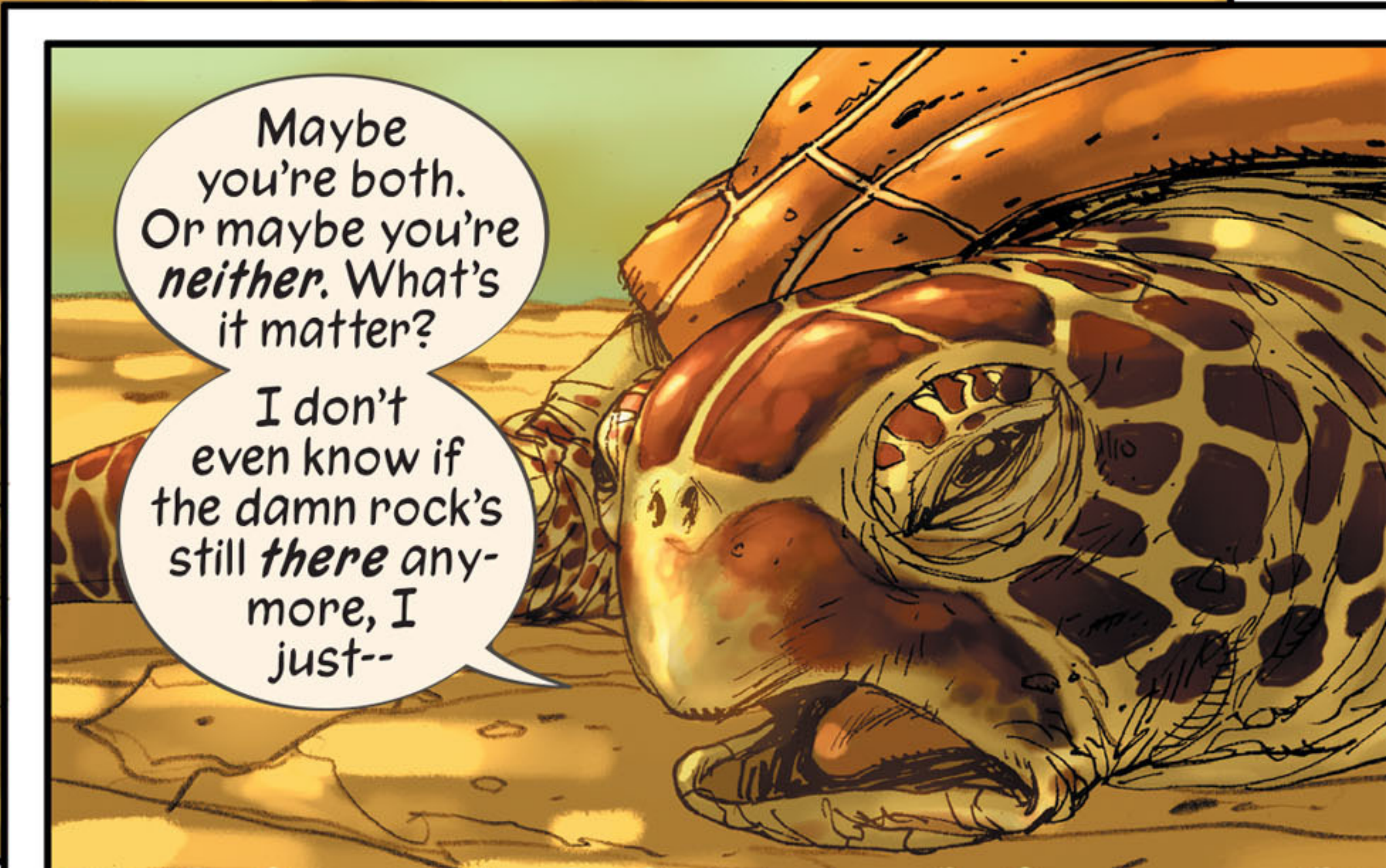
Legend says that as long as that statue's still standing, this land'll never fall to outsiders.



I don't follow.

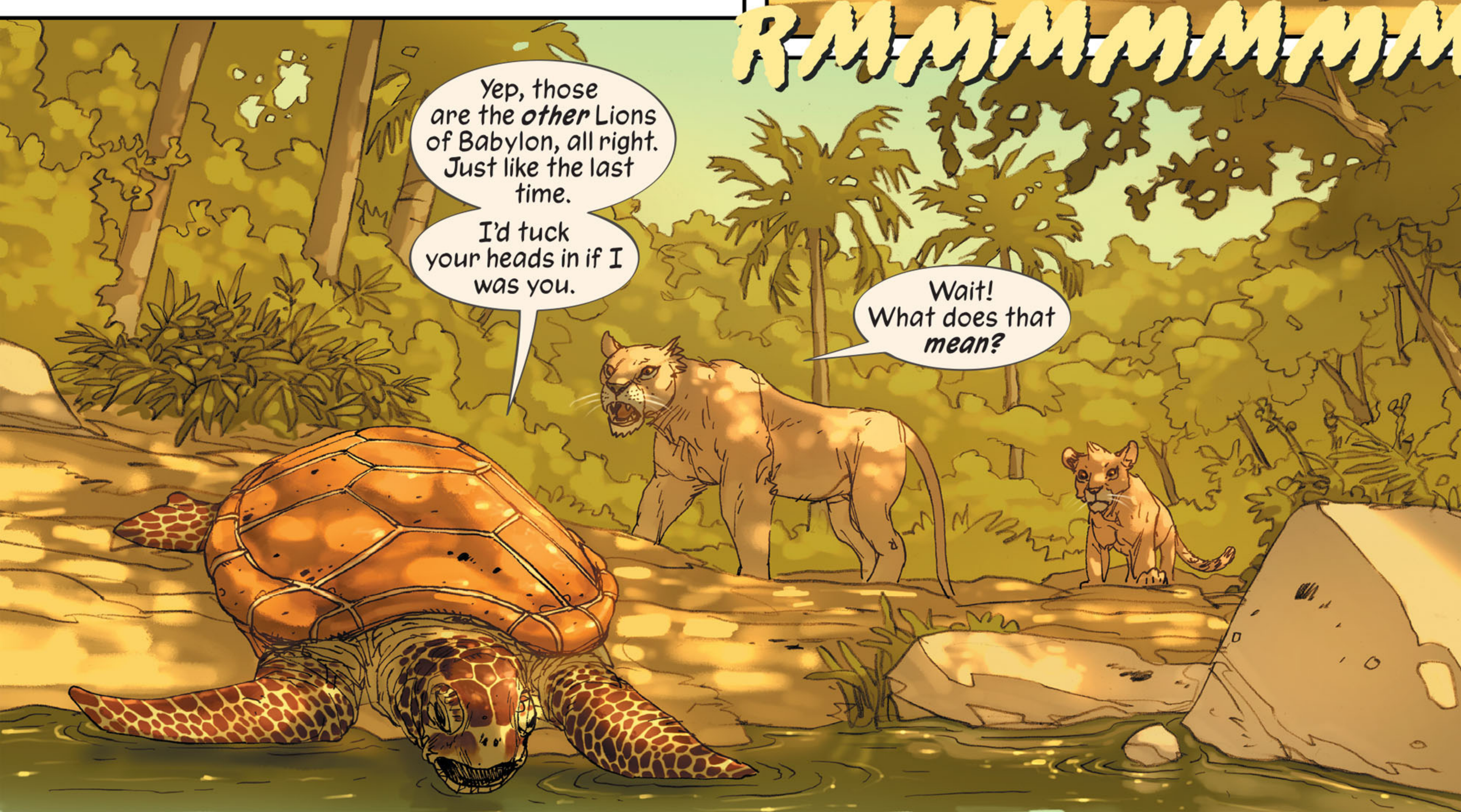
They're just, what do you call 'em... *symbols*. You know walkers, never say what they mean.

Yes, but this is *our* land now, too. Who are *we* supposed to be in the statue... the lion, or the man?



Maybe you're both. Or maybe you're *neither*. What's it matter?

I don't even know if the damn rock's still *there* any-more, I just--

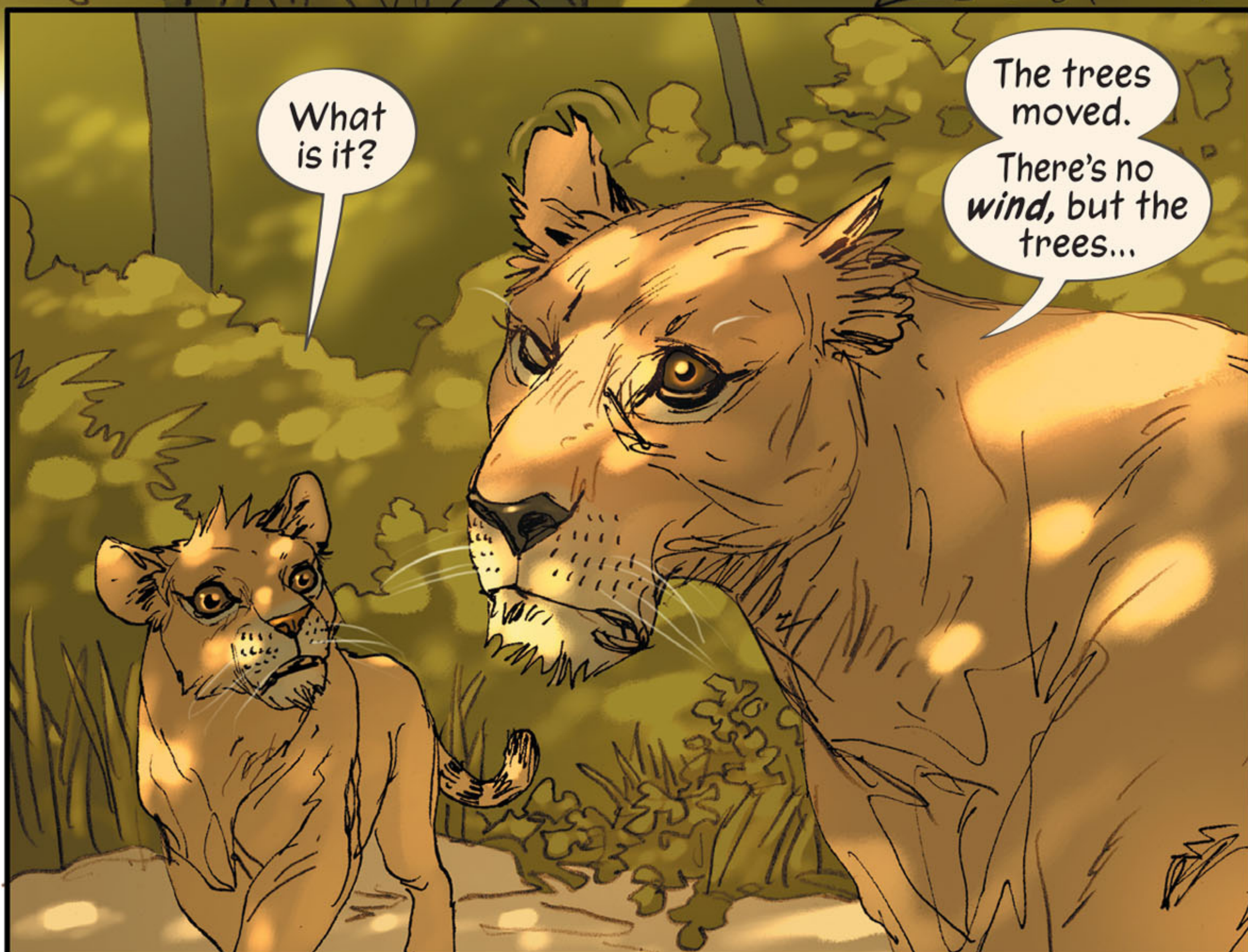
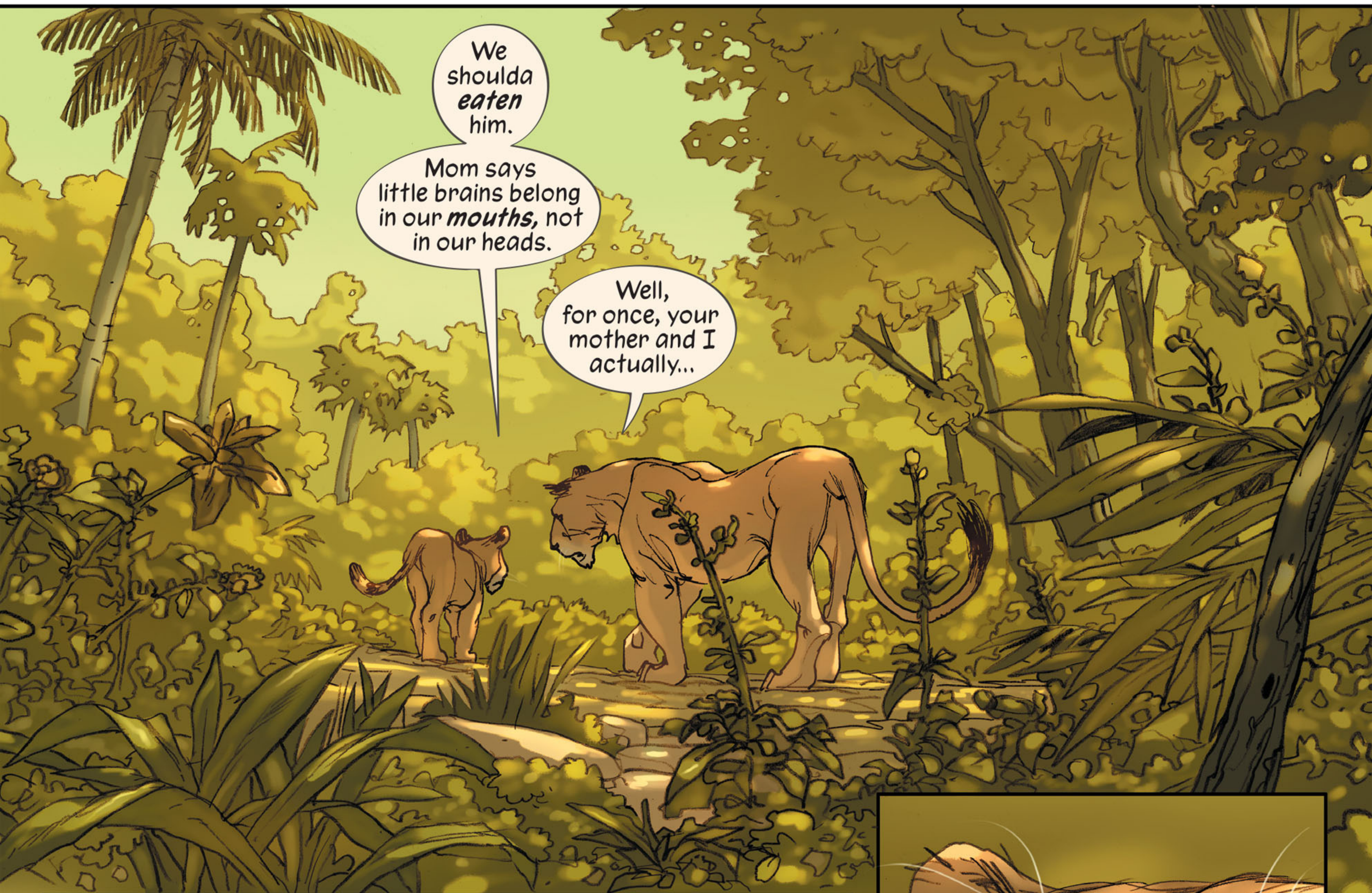
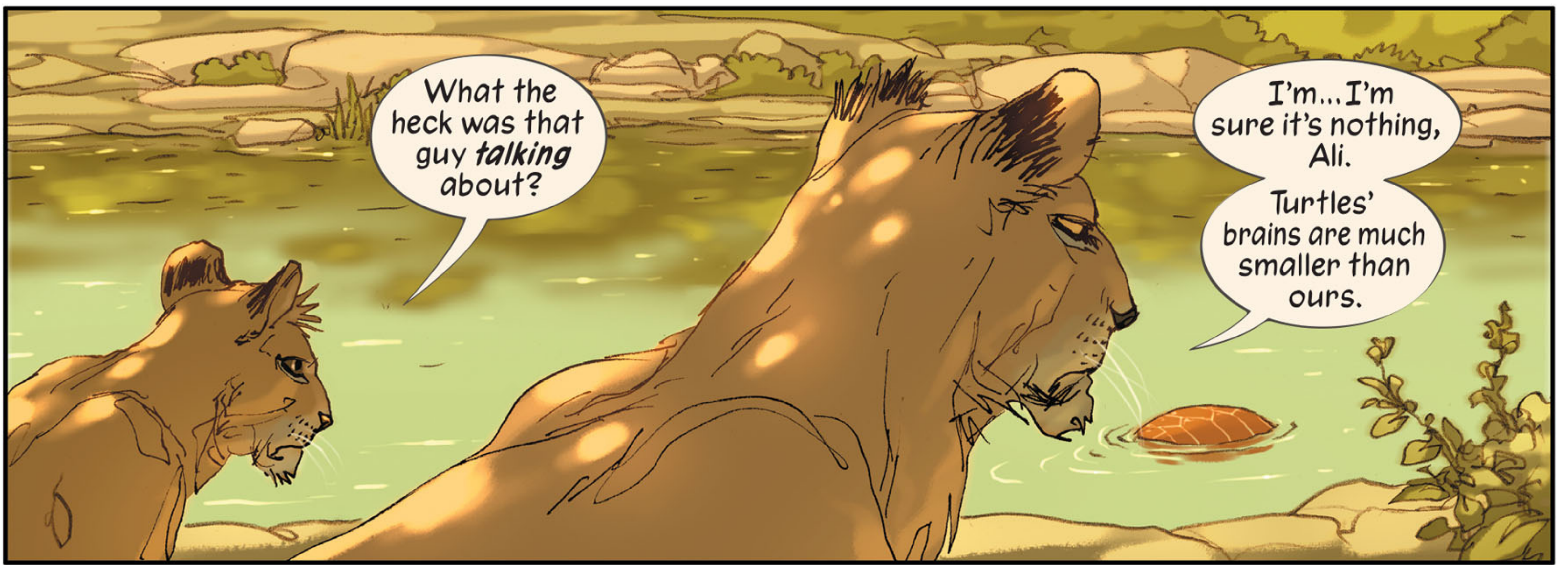


Yep, those are the *other* Lions of Babylon, all right. Just like the last time.

I'd tuck your heads in if I was you.

Wait! What does that *mean*?

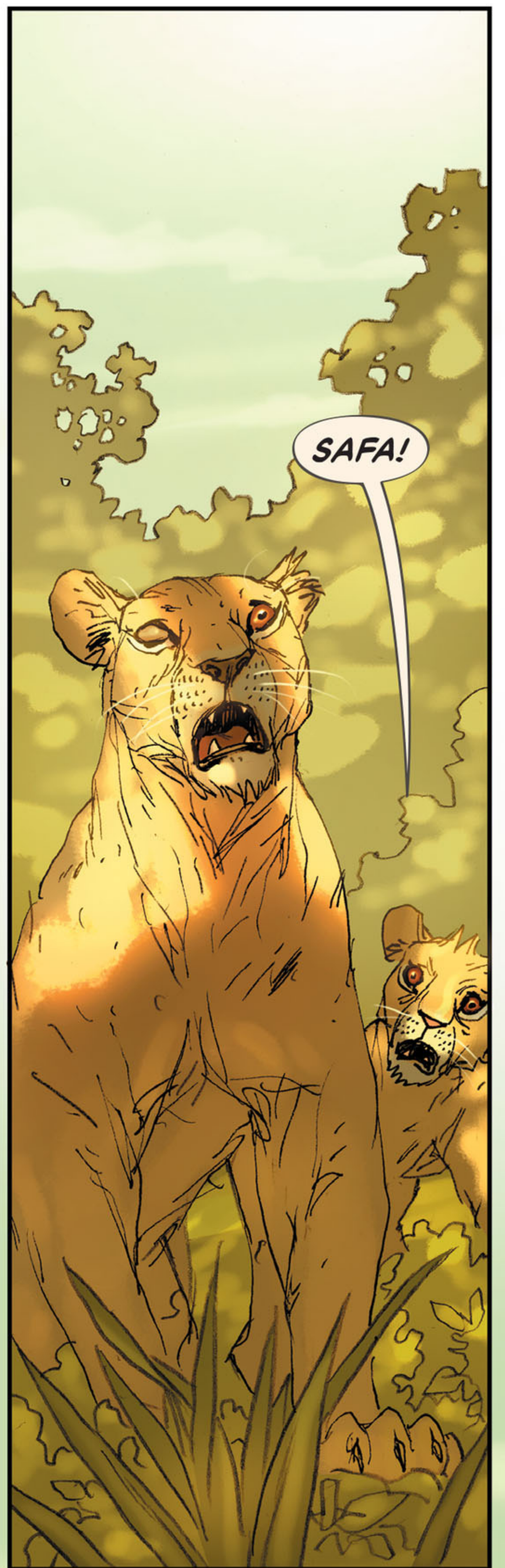
RAMMMMMMMMM

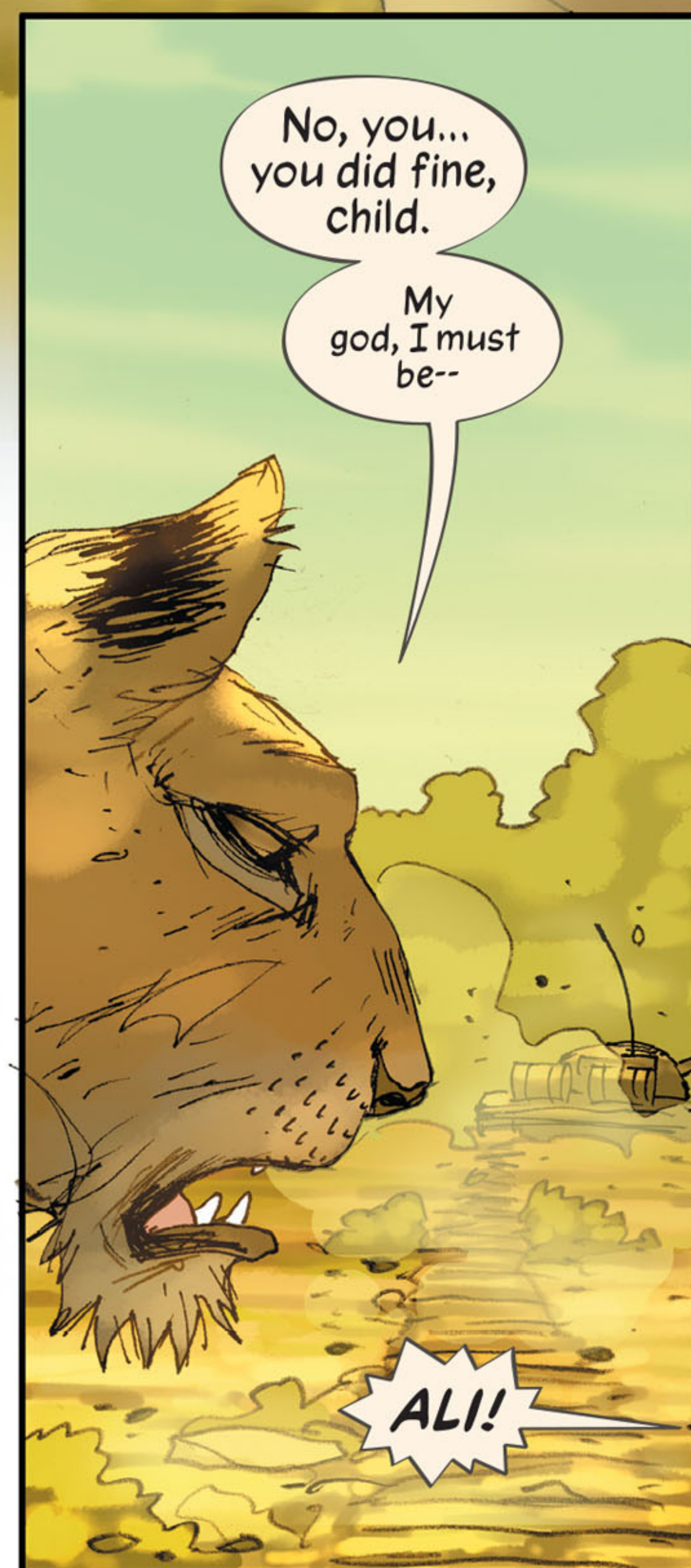
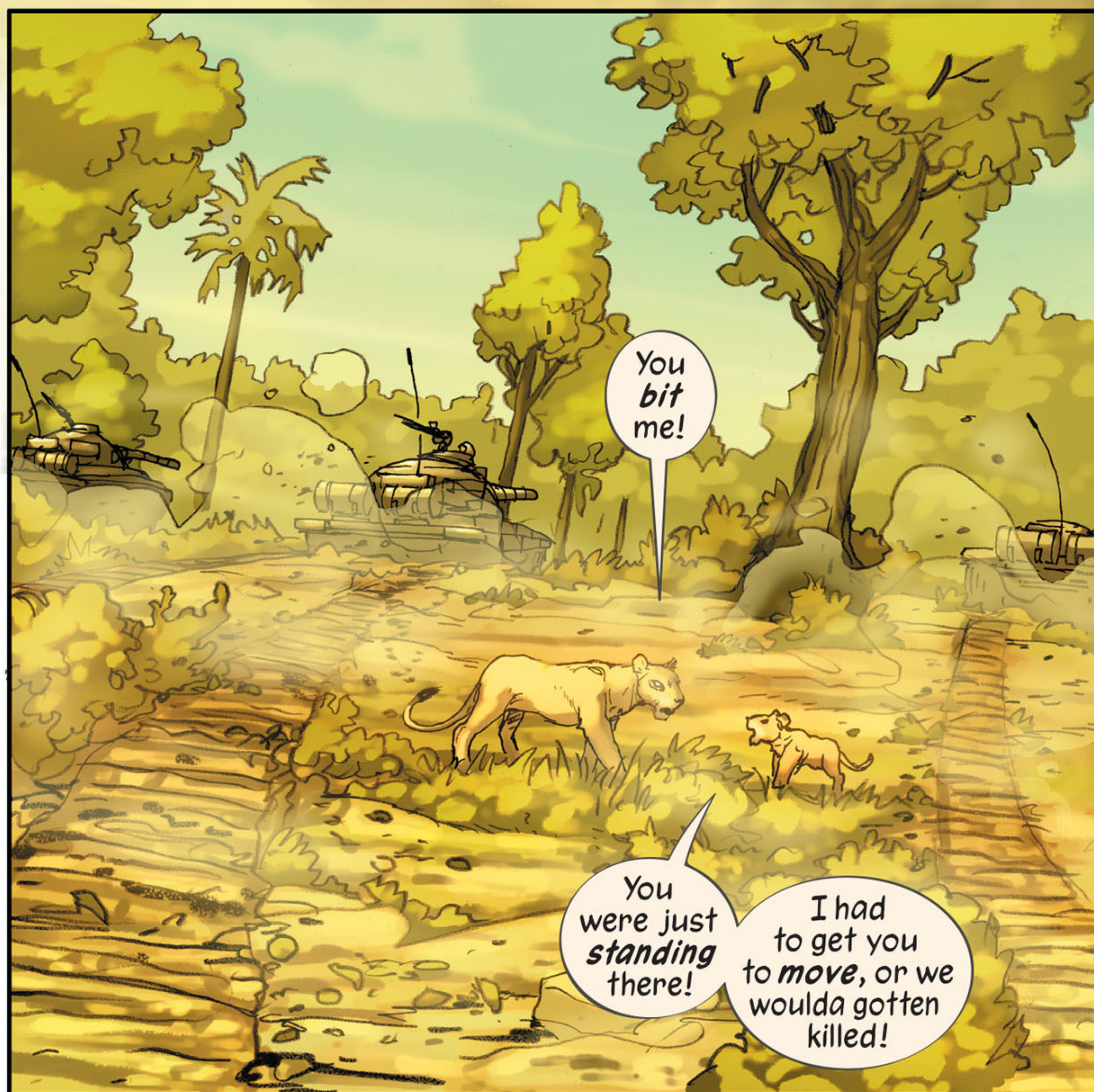




KHOD
BAELAK!

IFSAH
ISEKA!



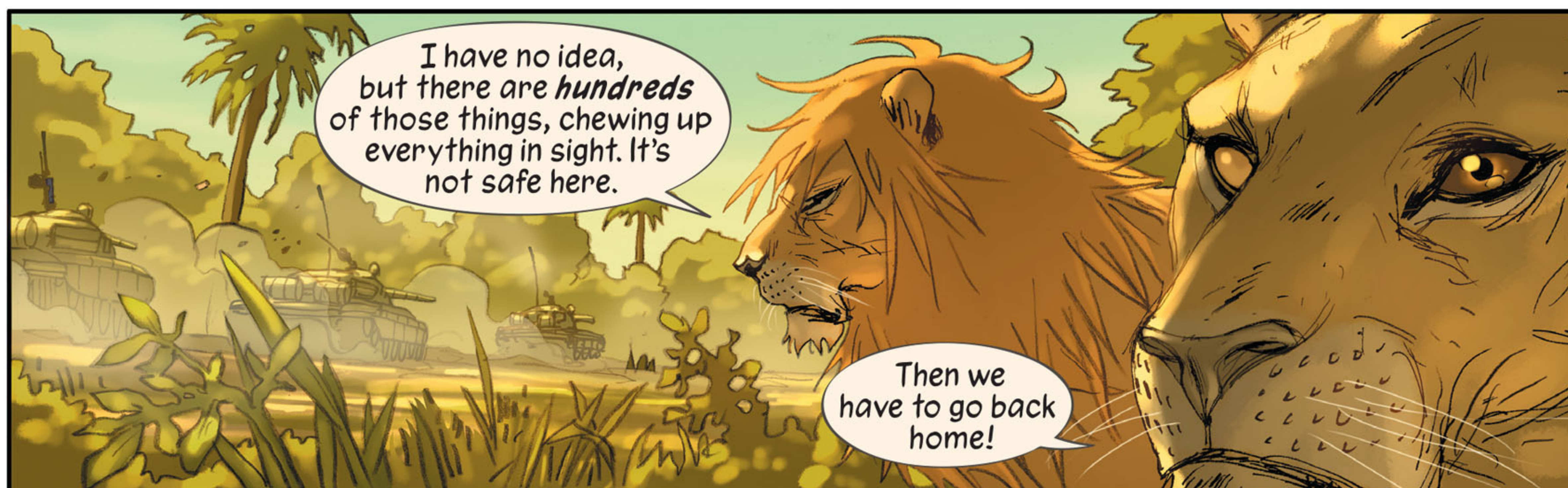




MOM!

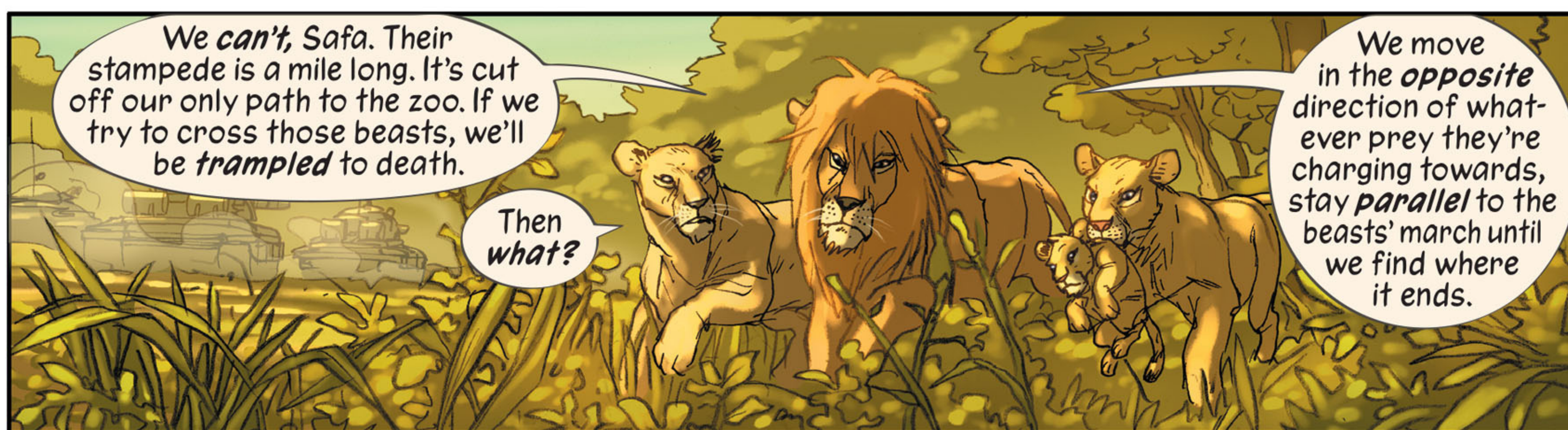
Zill,
what is
this?

What's
happening?



I have no idea,
but there are *hundreds*
of those things, chewing up
everything in sight. It's
not safe here.

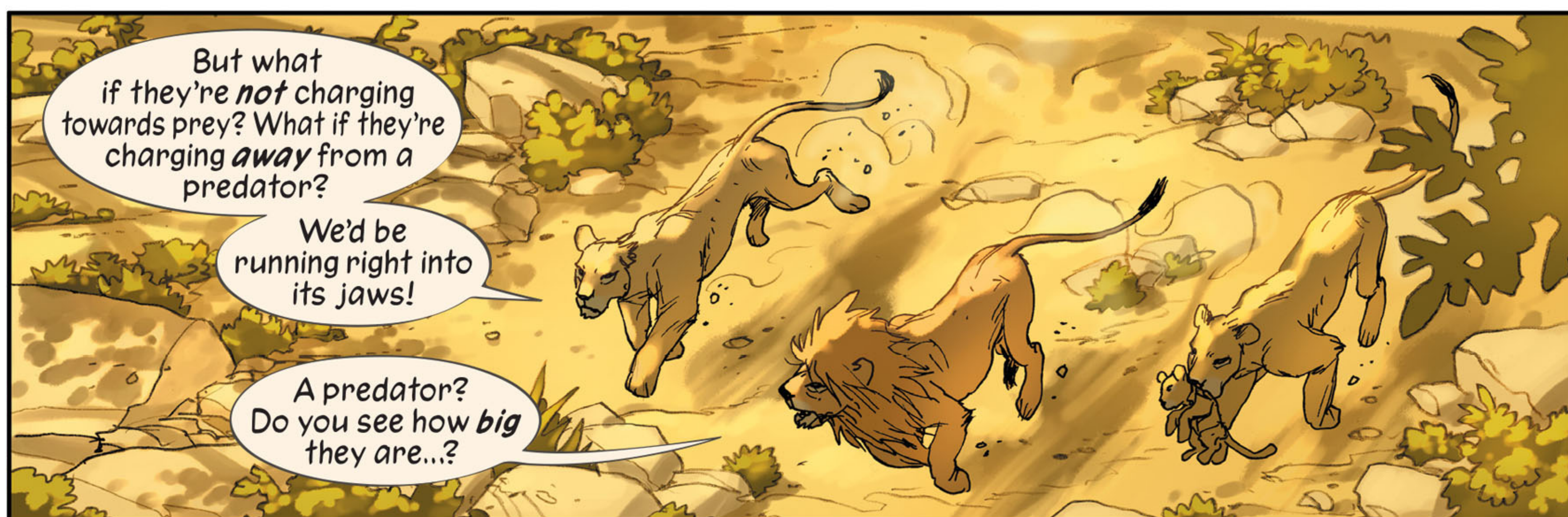
Then we
have to go back
home!



We *can't*, Safa. Their
stampede is a mile long. It's cut
off our only path to the zoo. If we
try to cross those beasts, we'll
be *trampled* to death.

Then
what?

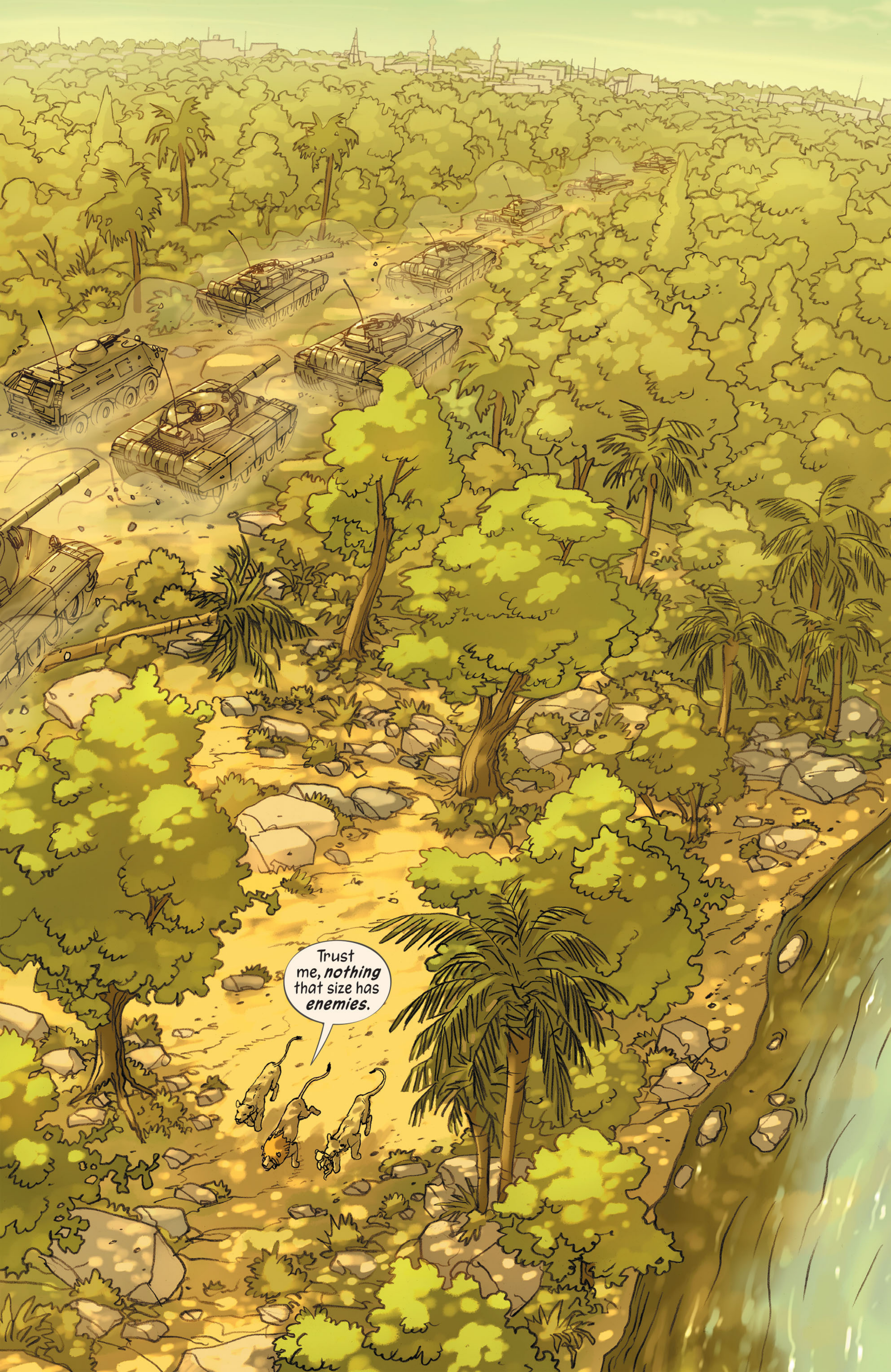
We move
in the *opposite*
direction of what-
ever prey they're
charging towards,
stay *parallel* to the
beasts' march until
we find where
it ends.



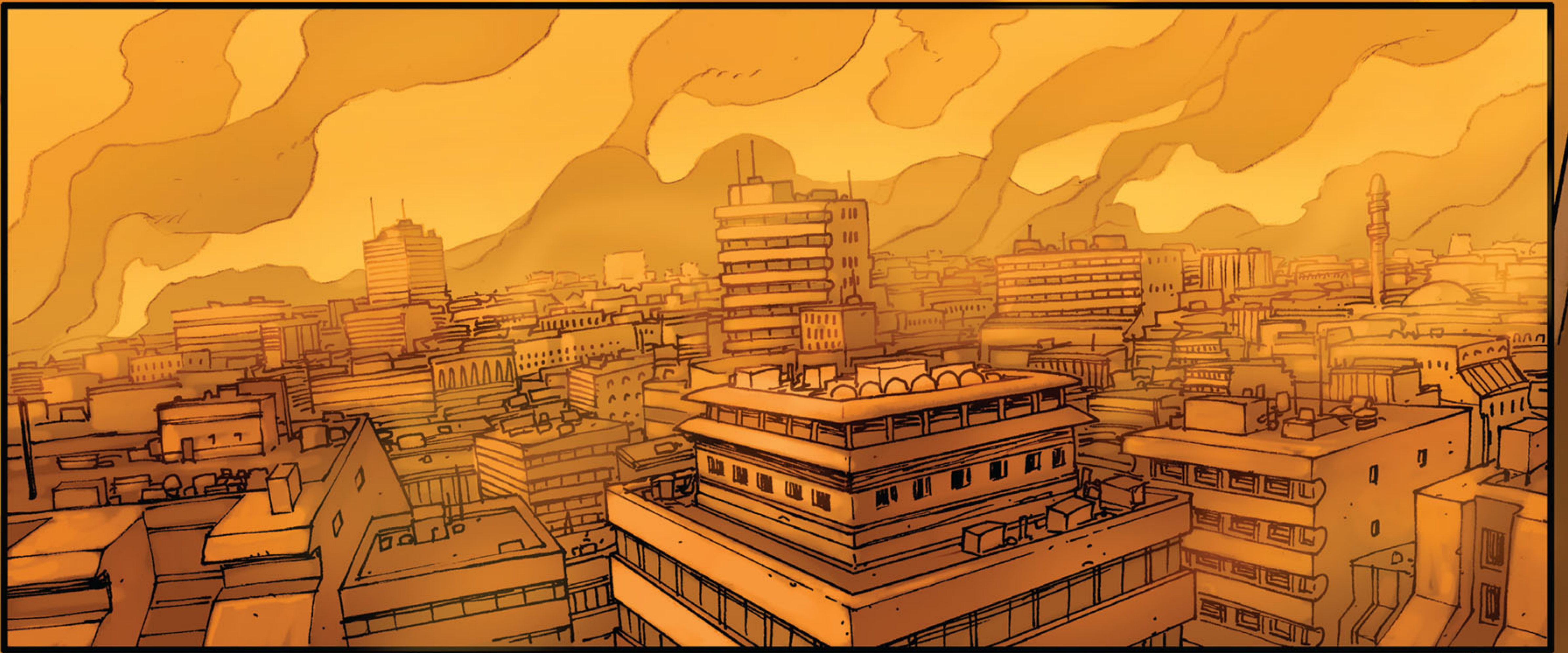
But what
if they're *not* charging
towards prey? What if they're
charging *away* from a
predator?

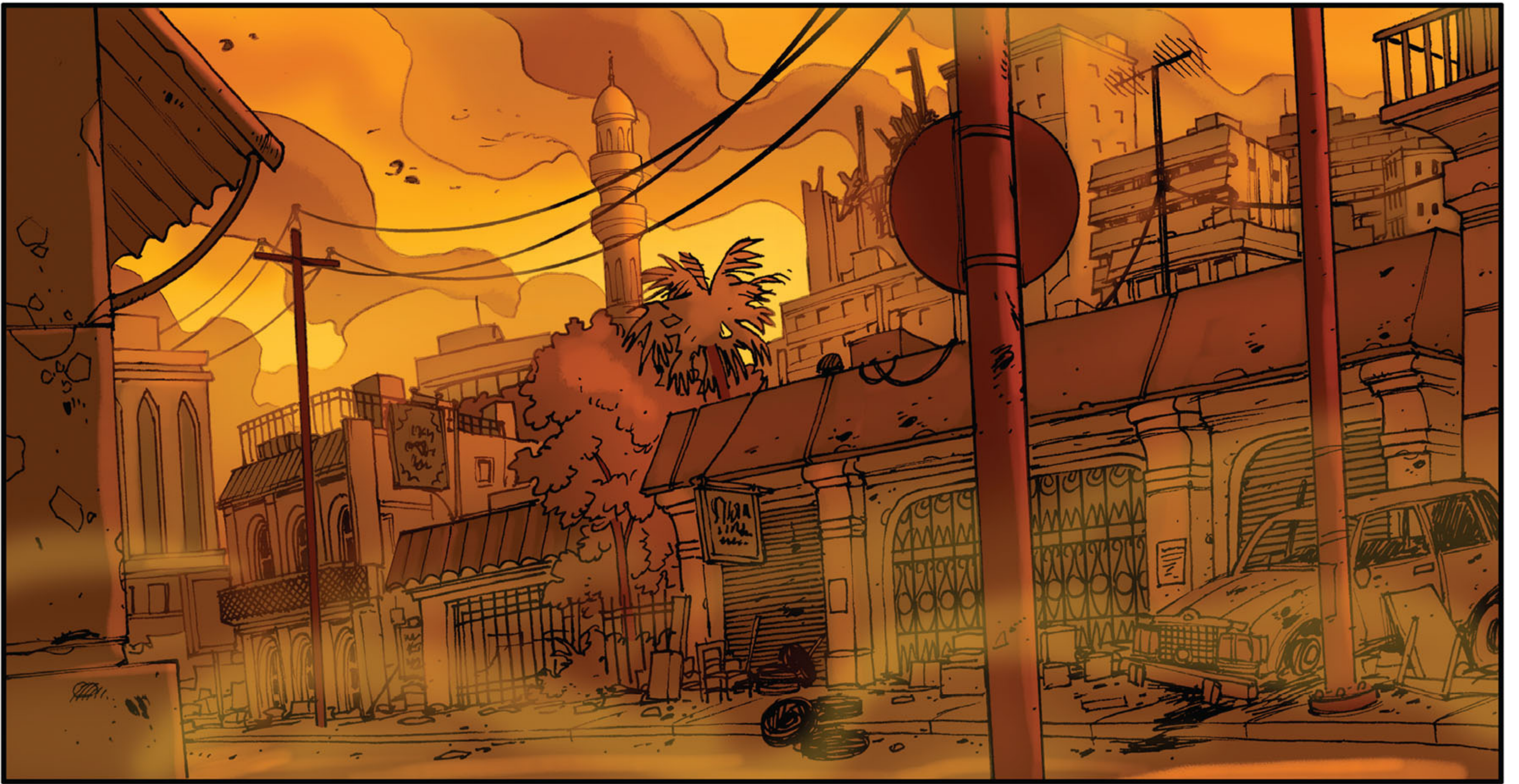
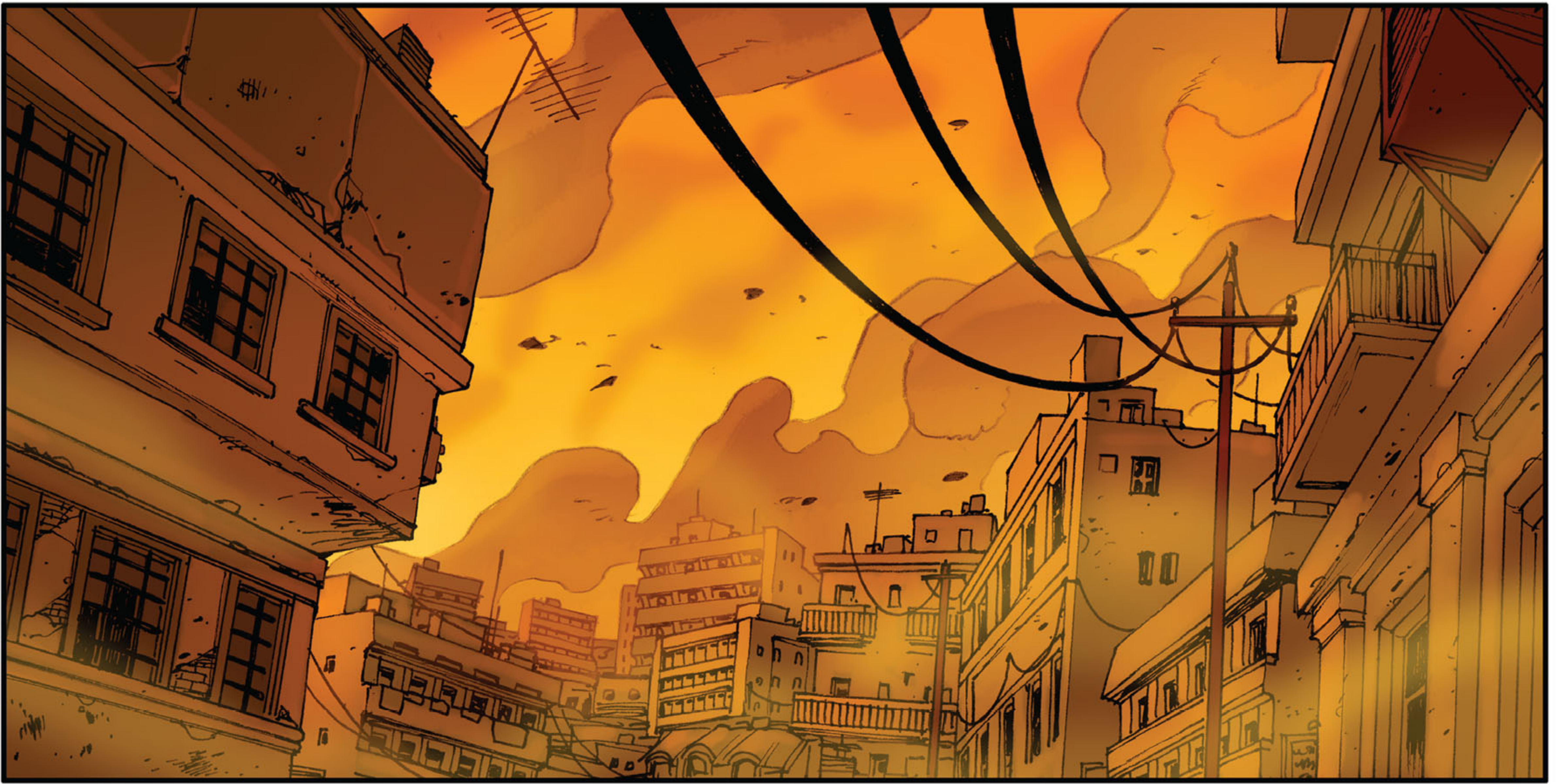
We'd be
running right into
its jaws!

A predator?
Do you see how *big*
they are...?



Trust
me, *nothing*
that size has
enemies.







Where
are we?

I have
no idea. I can
barely keep my
damn eye
open.

There's
not much to
see.

I...I
think it's
another
zoo.

Well,
wouldn't *that*
be bloody
perfect.

Oh, bite
your tongue,
Safa.

You're the
one who *wanted*
to spend the rest of
her life behind
bars.

Save it,
ladies.

If we don't
find food or shelter
soon, we'll be ready
for the *vultures* by
morning.

Then we should
keep moving upwind, so any
prey ahead of us won't be able
to catch our scents.

Are
you *mad*,
Noor?

If we
keep walking
into this storm,
we'll be sliced
to pieces.

Safa's right.
If there were any
free meals out here,
we probably would have
stumbled across
one already.

We should
double back and
look for a place to
rest until the wind
dies down.



I see.

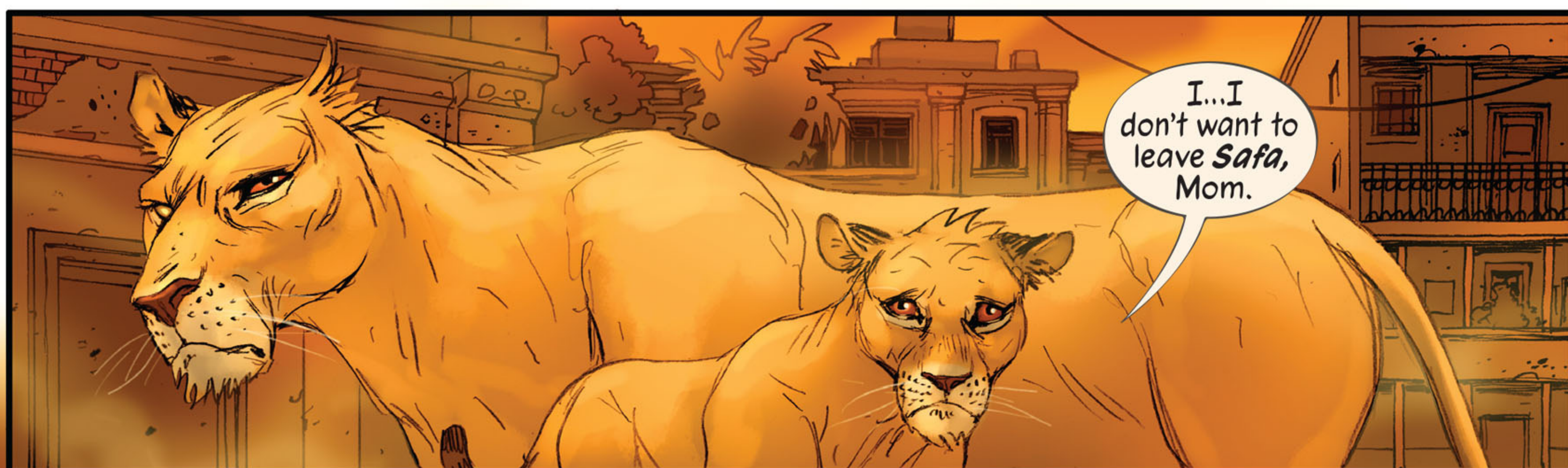
Now that you've finished spilling your *seed* into me, my opinions are worthless, is that it?

This has nothing to do with--

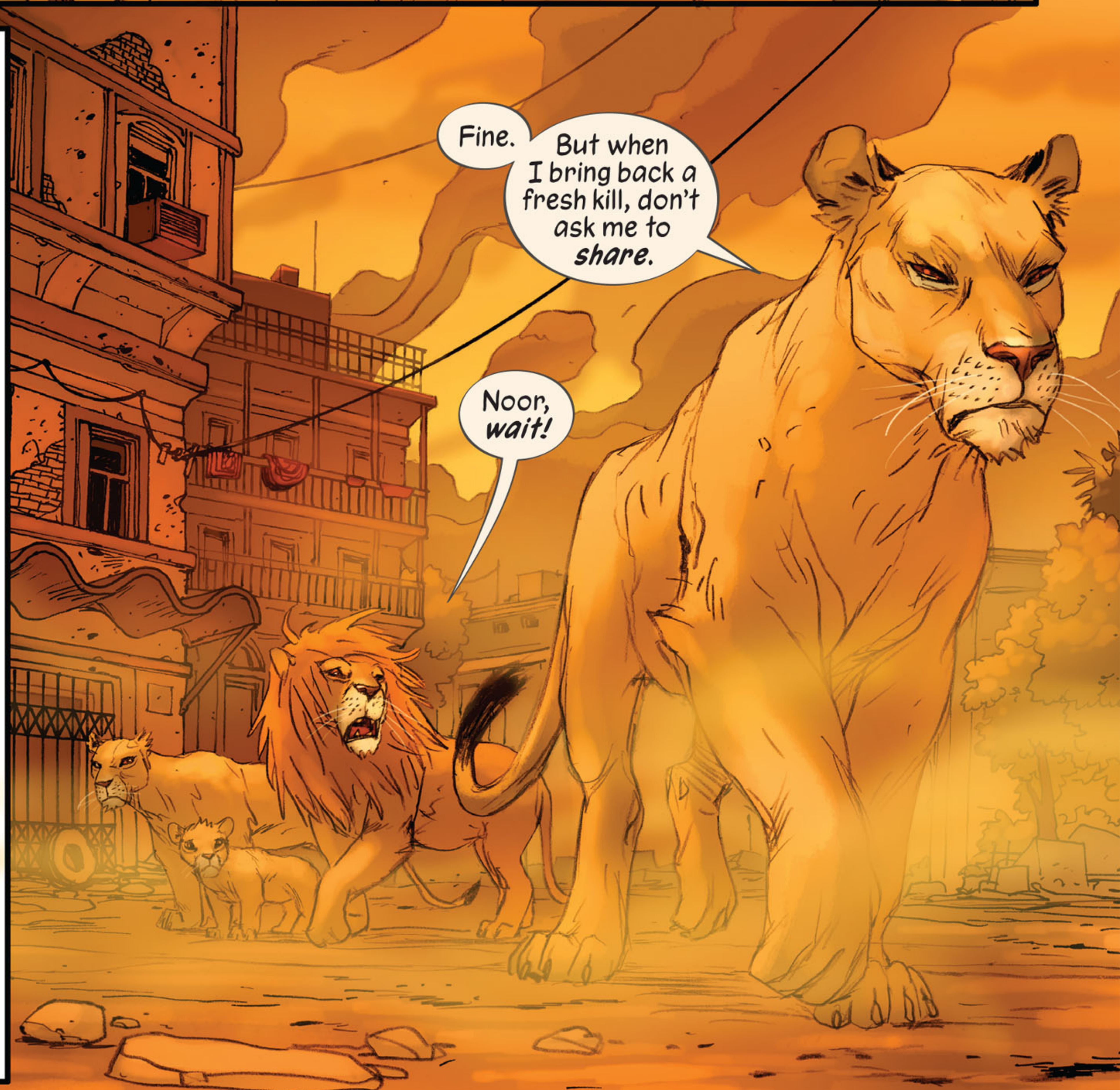


Have fun bedding that *shrew*, Zill.

Come, Ali. We'll hunt on our own.



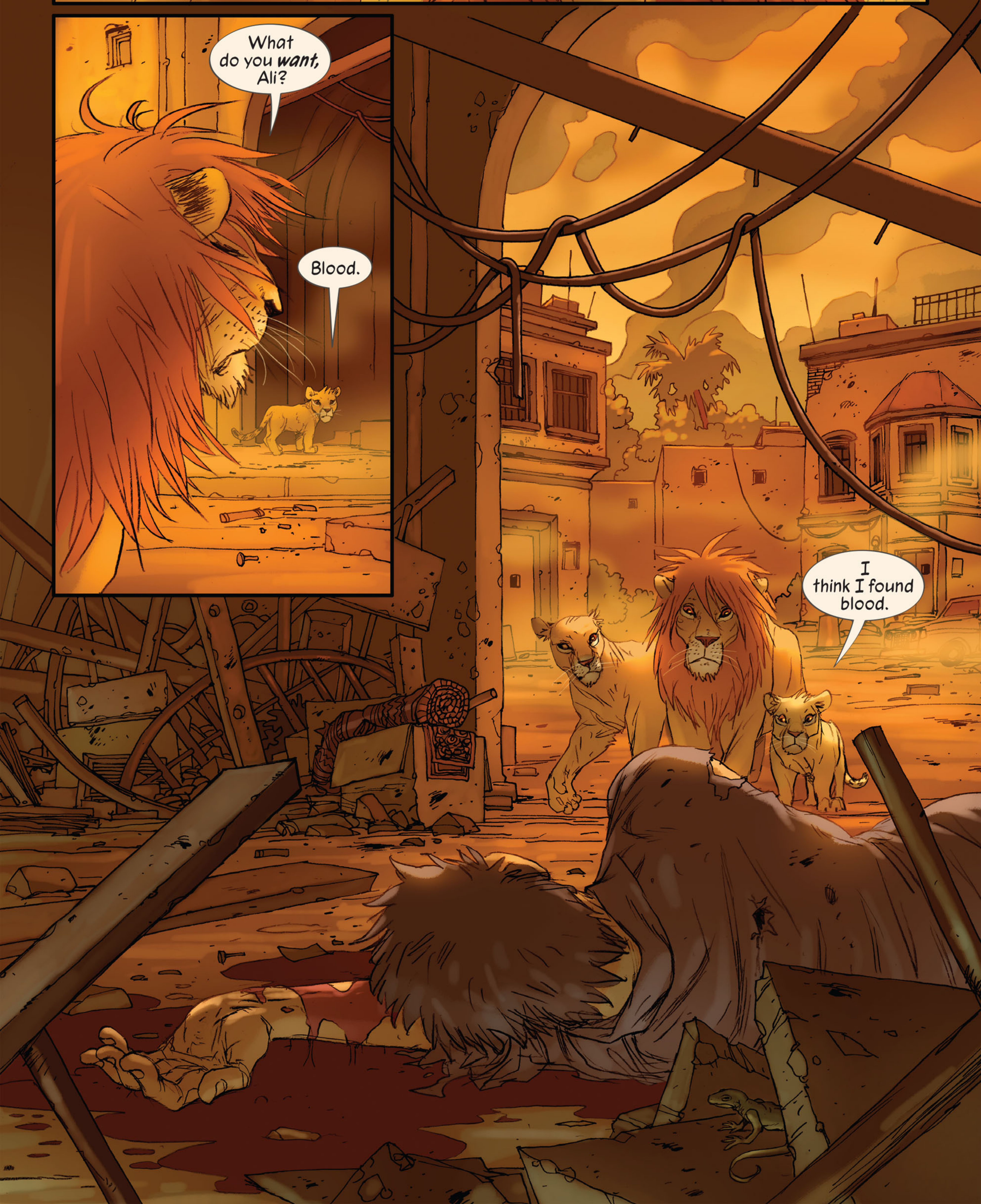
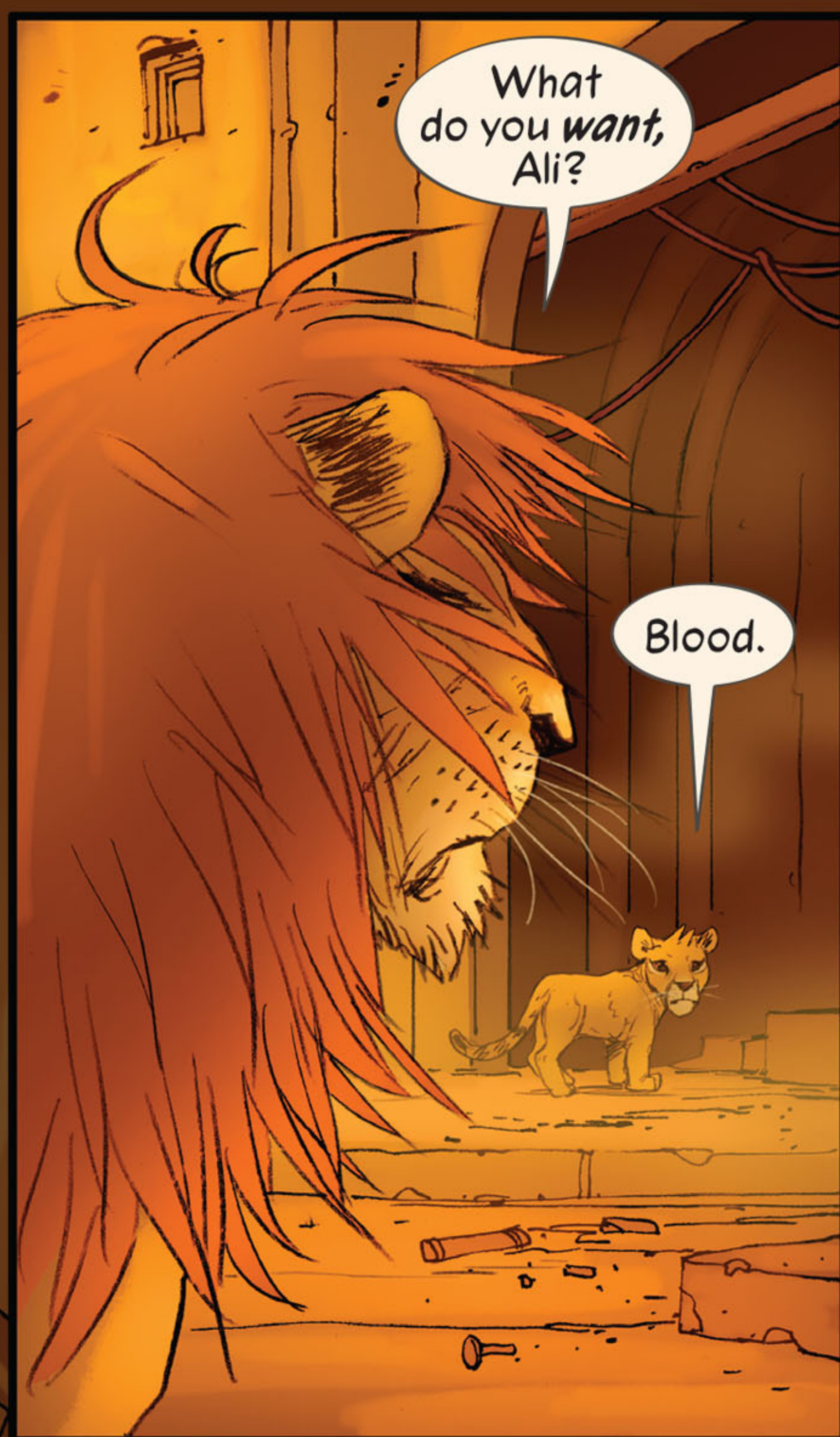
I...I don't want to leave *Safa*, Mom.



Fine.

But when I bring back a fresh kill, don't ask me to *share*.

Noor, wait!





So this is paradise, eh?

What have you gotten yourself into, girl? What have you--

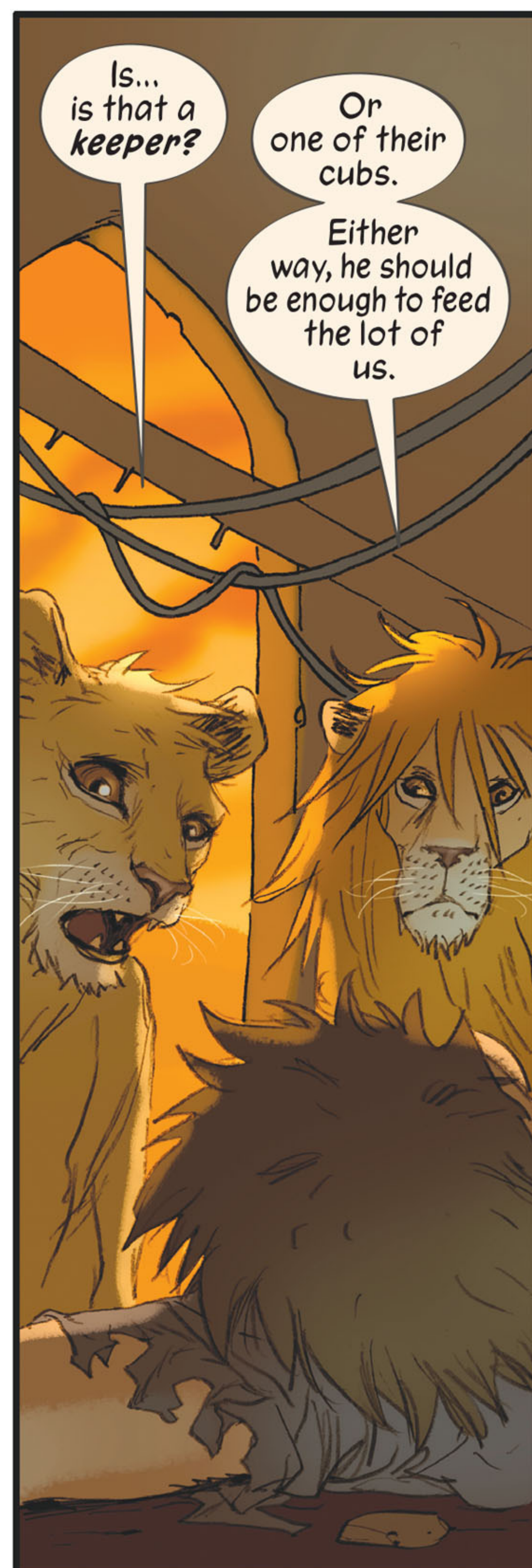
CA-CLOK
CA-CLOK

Who's there?

If...if you so much as *look* at me, I'll kill you all. I...



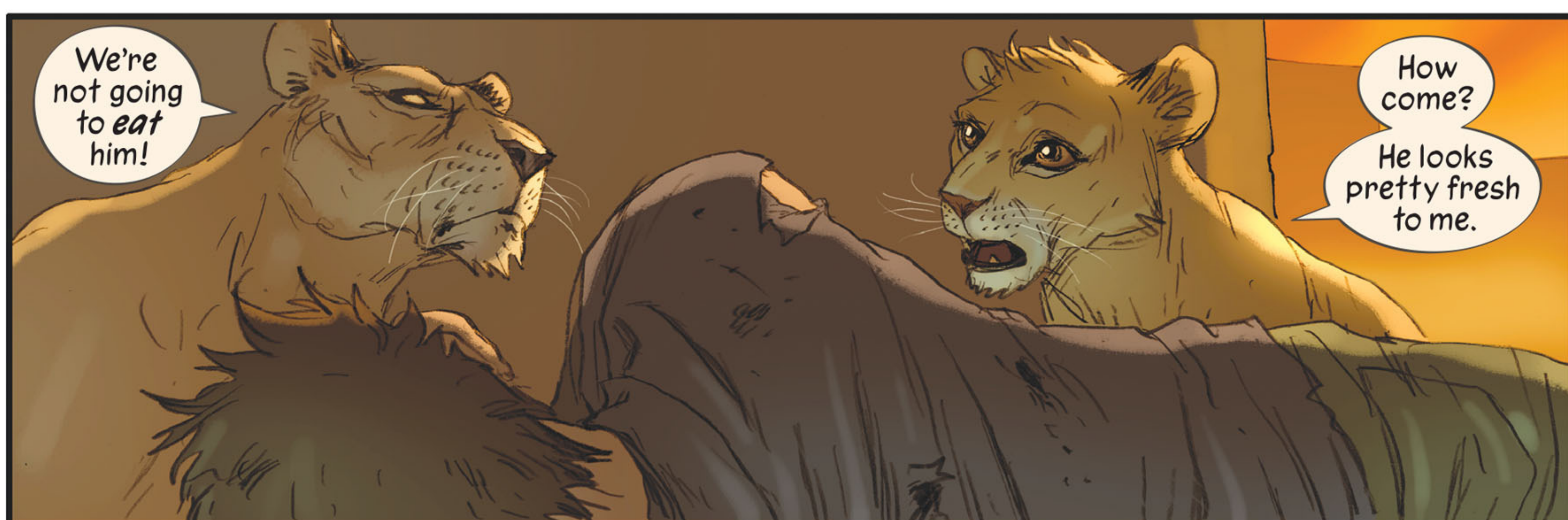
Oh.



Is...
is that a
keeper?

Or
one of their
cubs.

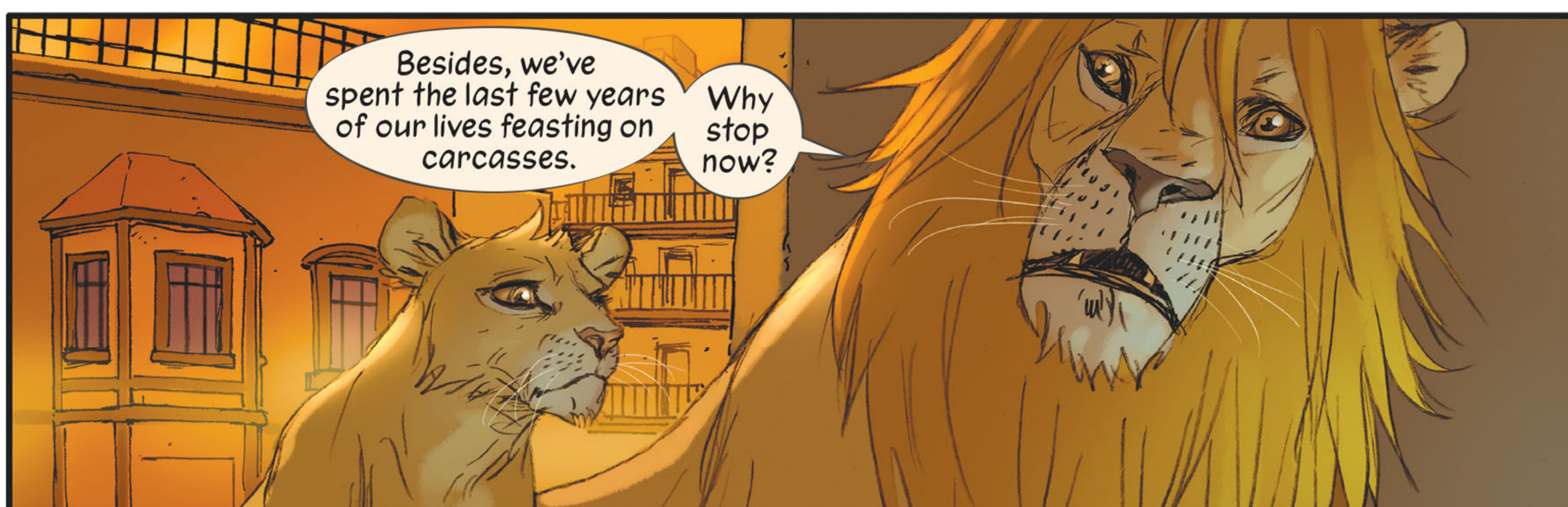
Either
way, he should
be enough to feed
the lot of
us.



We're
not going
to *eat*
him!

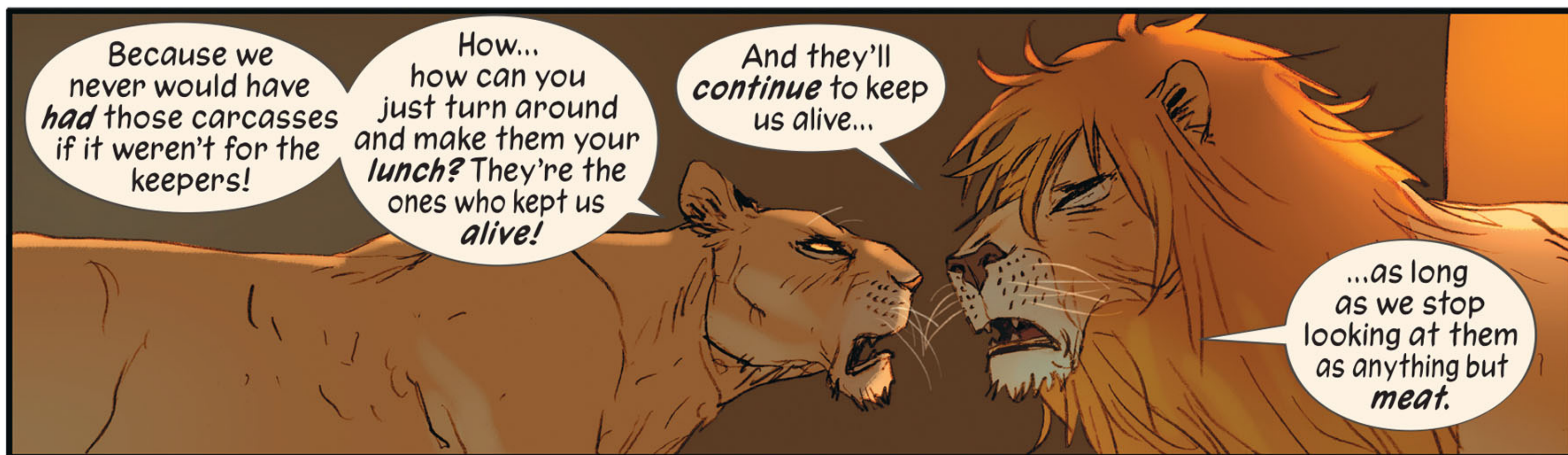
How
come?

He looks
pretty fresh
to me.



Besides, we've
spent the last few years
of our lives feasting on
carcasses.

Why
stop
now?

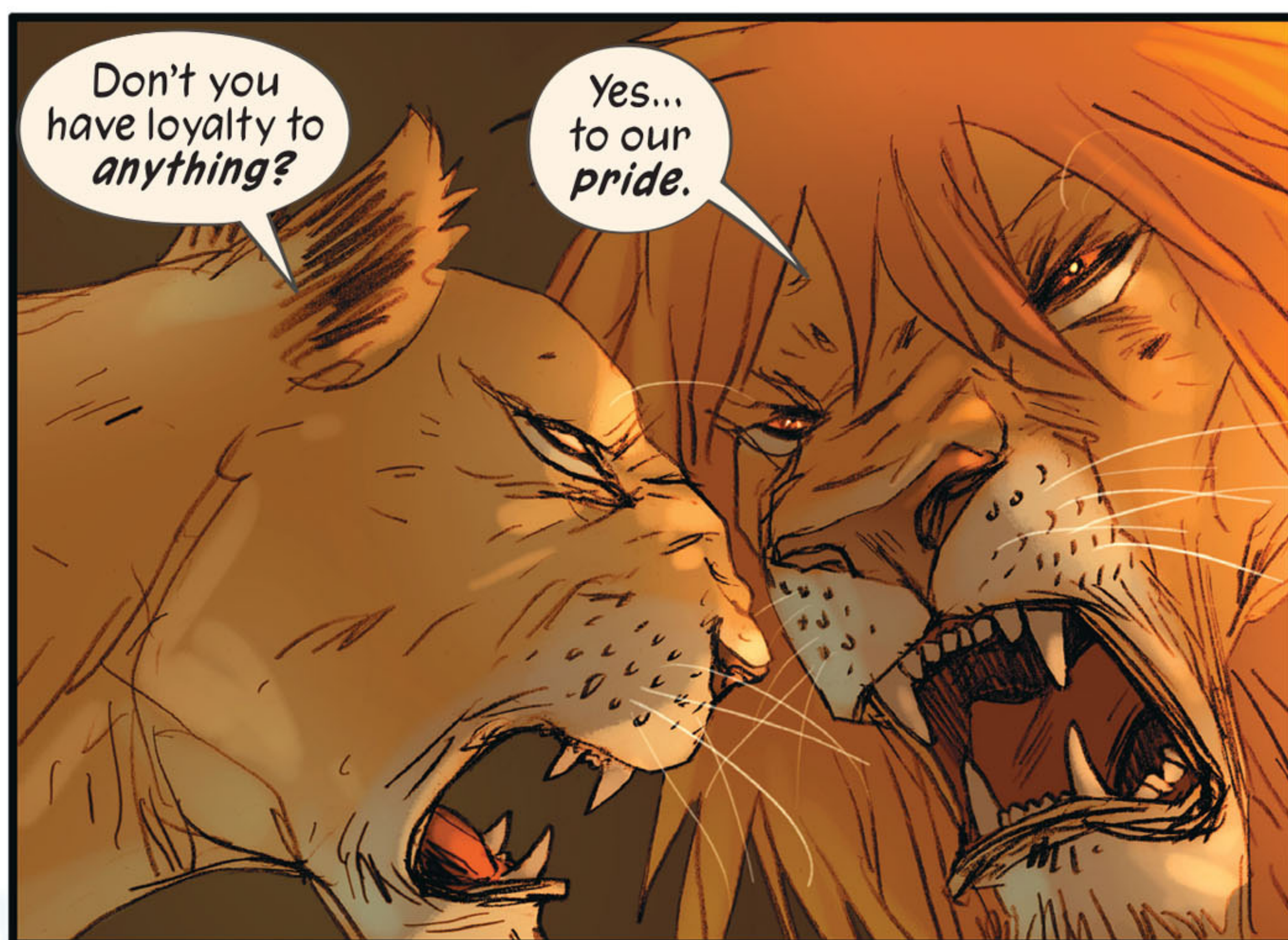


Because we never would have *had* those carcasses if it weren't for the keepers!

How... how can you just turn around and make them your *lunch*? They're the ones who kept us *alive*!

And they'll *continue* to keep us alive...

...as long as we stop looking at them as anything but *meat*.



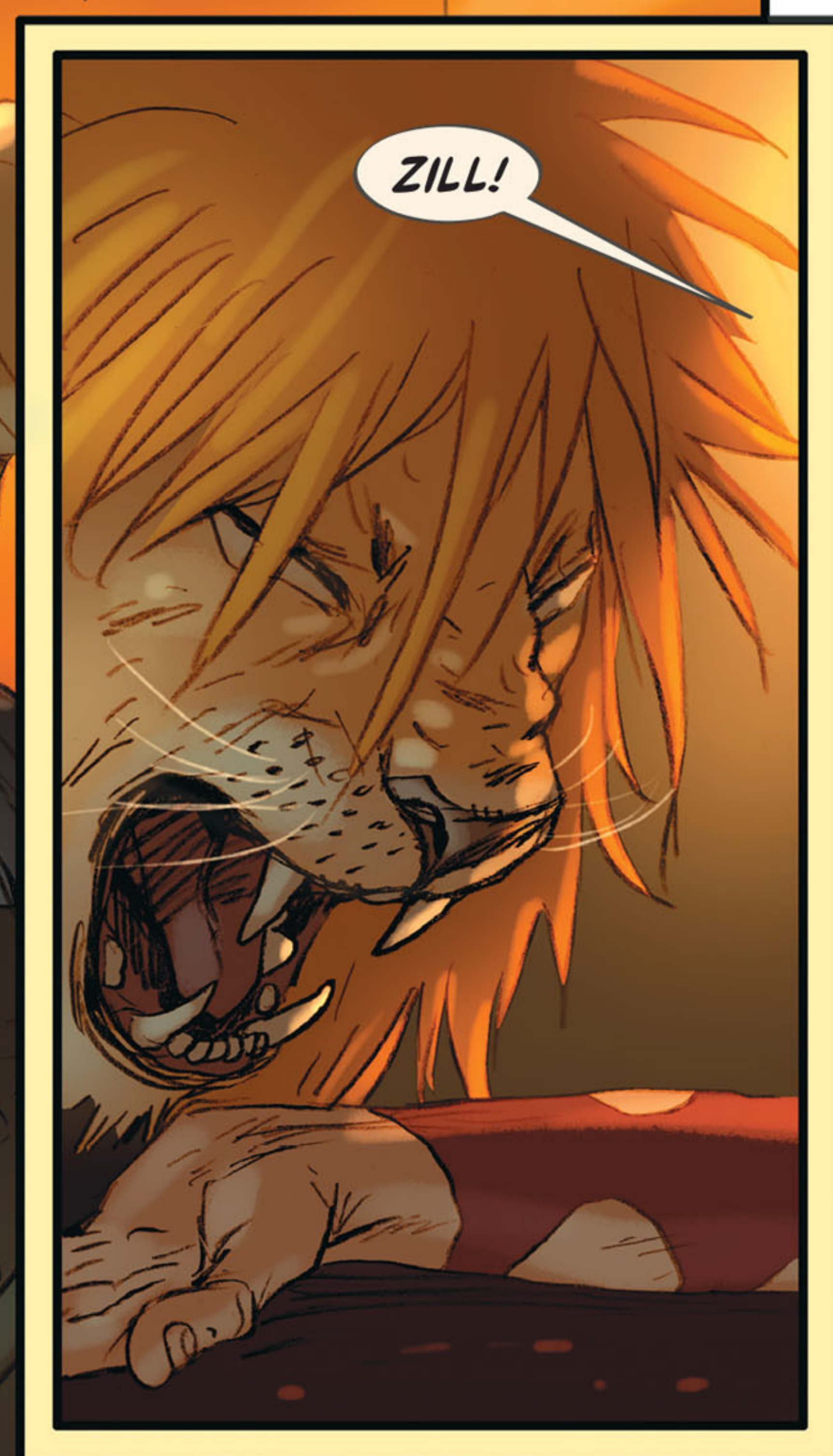
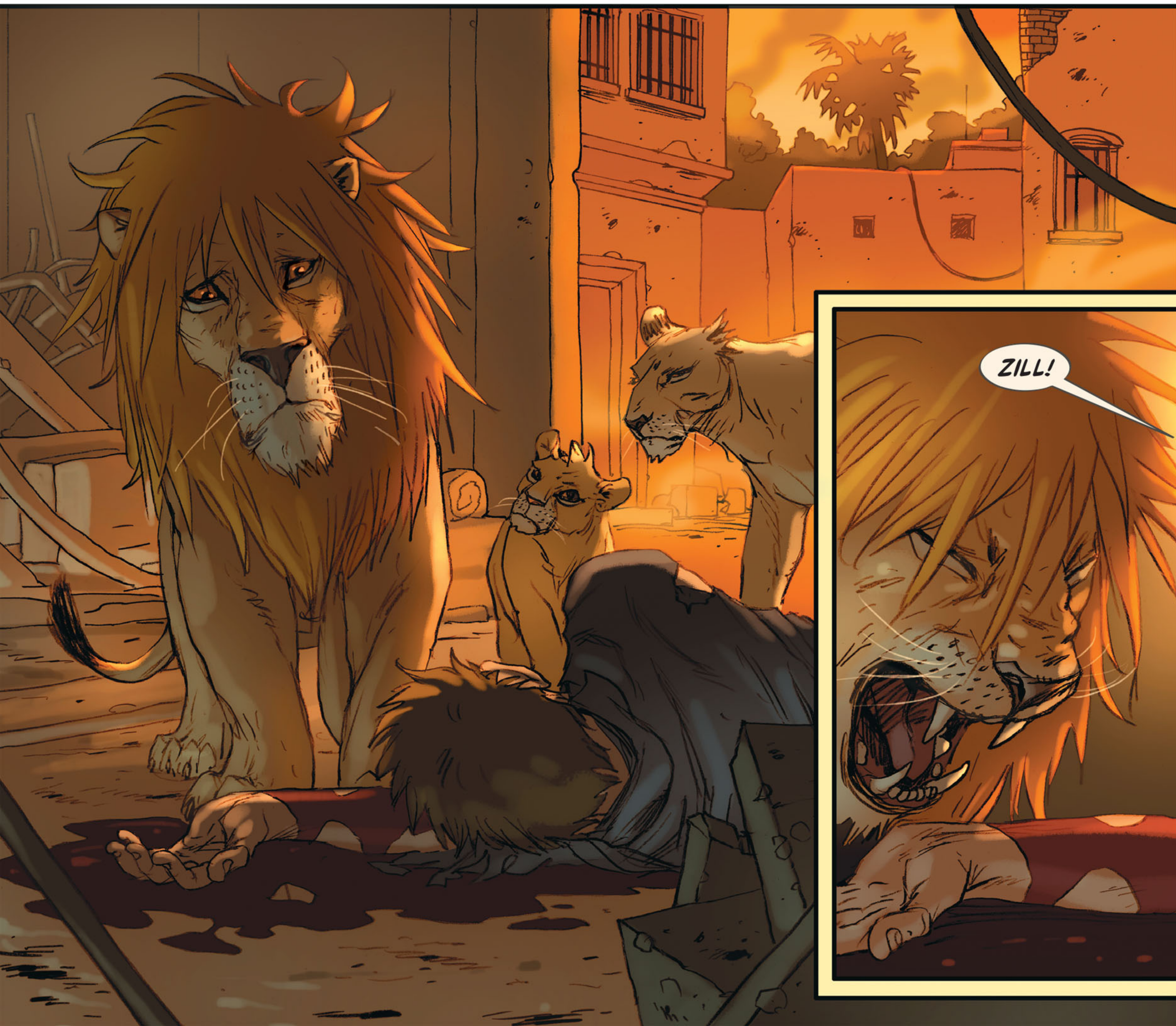
Don't you have loyalty to *anything*?

Yes... to our *pride*.



If that's how you feel, then *you* take the first bite.

You tear into the flesh of one of the creatures who *protected* us.



ZILL!





...not
wolf.

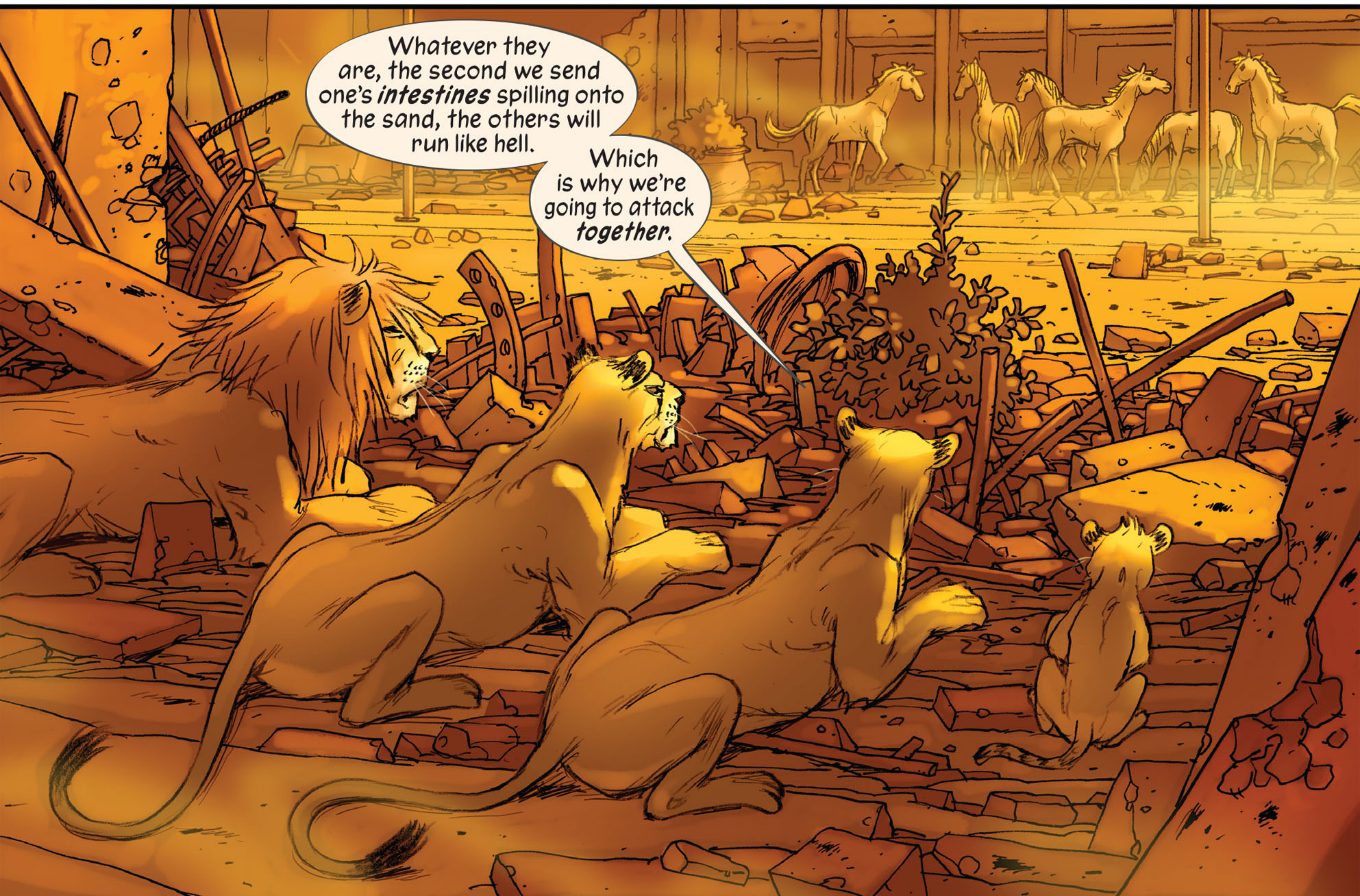


No sudden movements, anyone.

What... what *are* they?

They're like gazelles, without the damn horns.

And they're *fatter*.



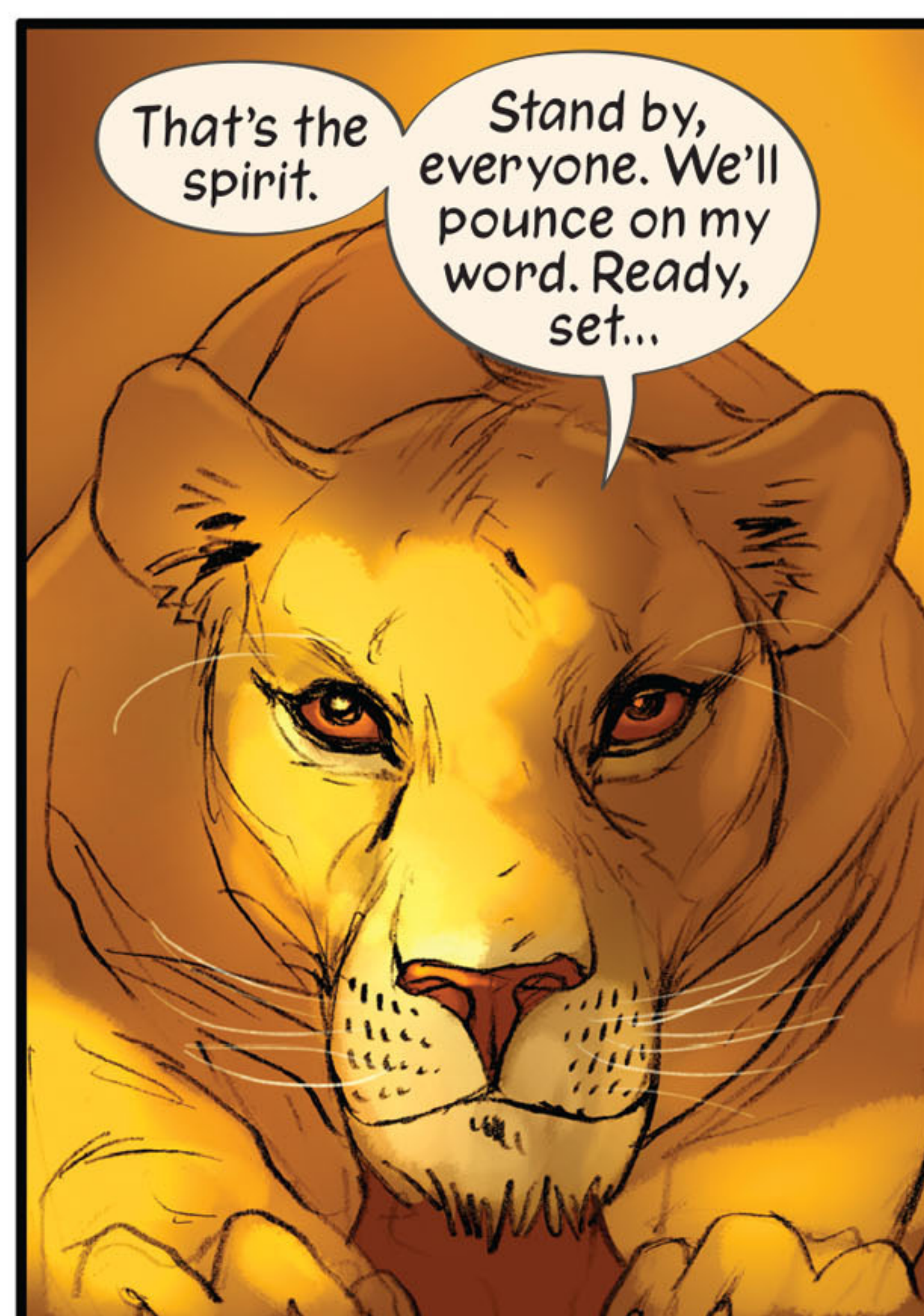
Whatever they are, the second we send one's *intestines* spilling onto the sand, the others will run like hell.

Which is why we're going to attack *together*.



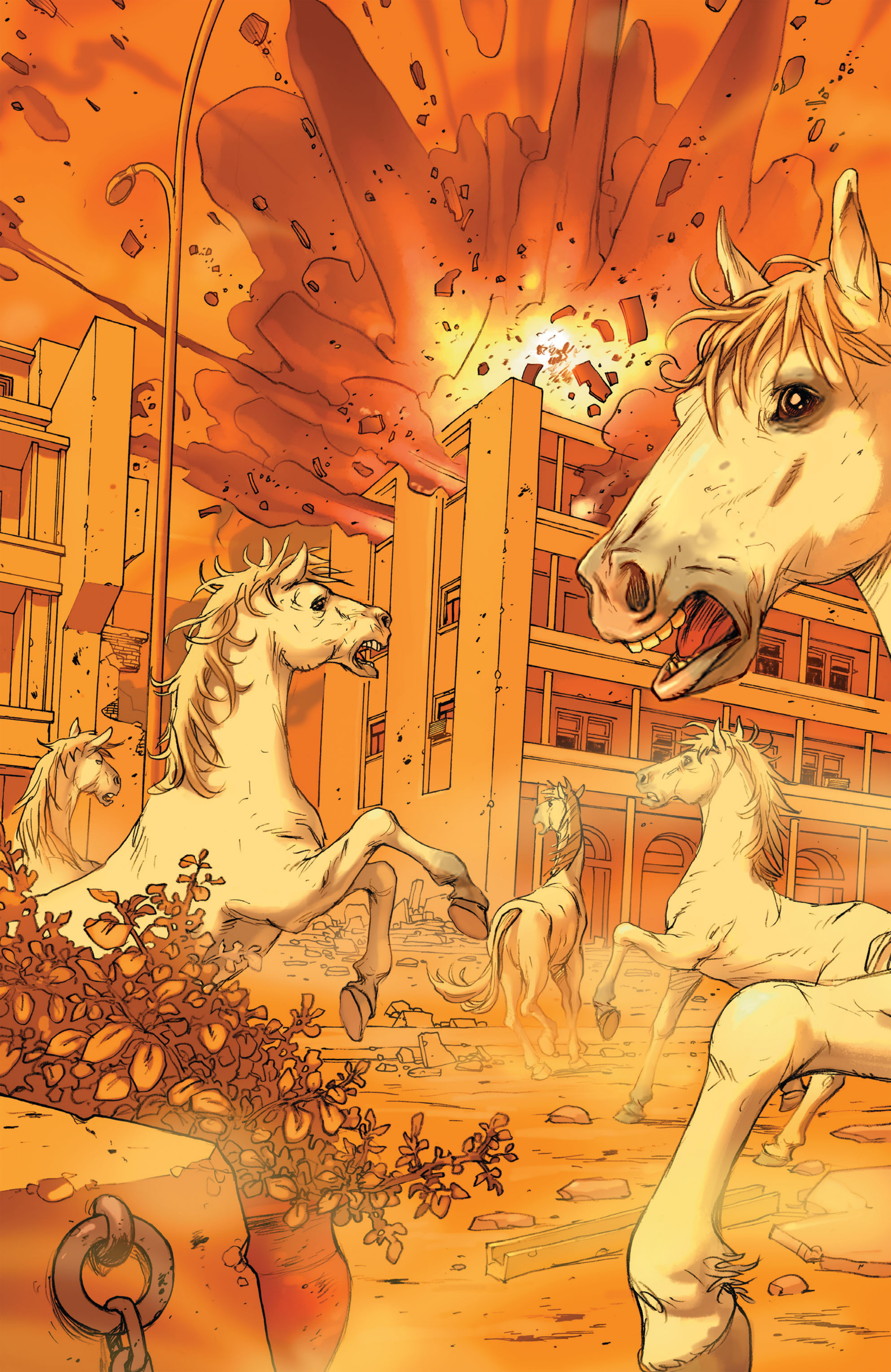
If we each strike a different one simultaneously, we should be able to bring down *three* of them while the others flee.

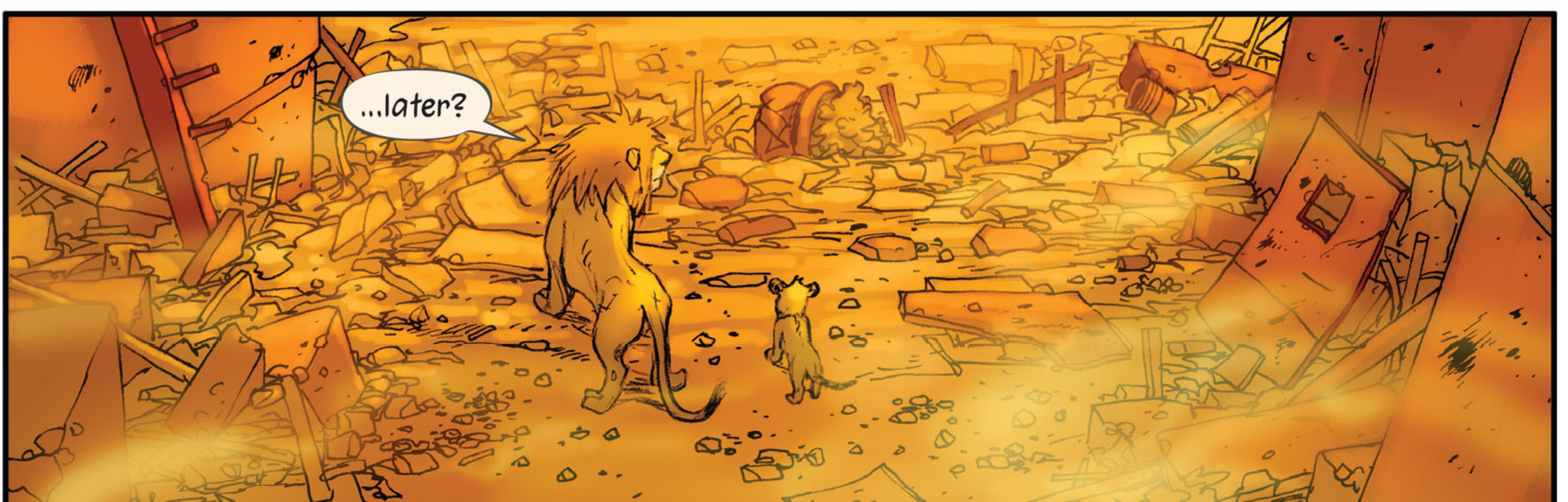
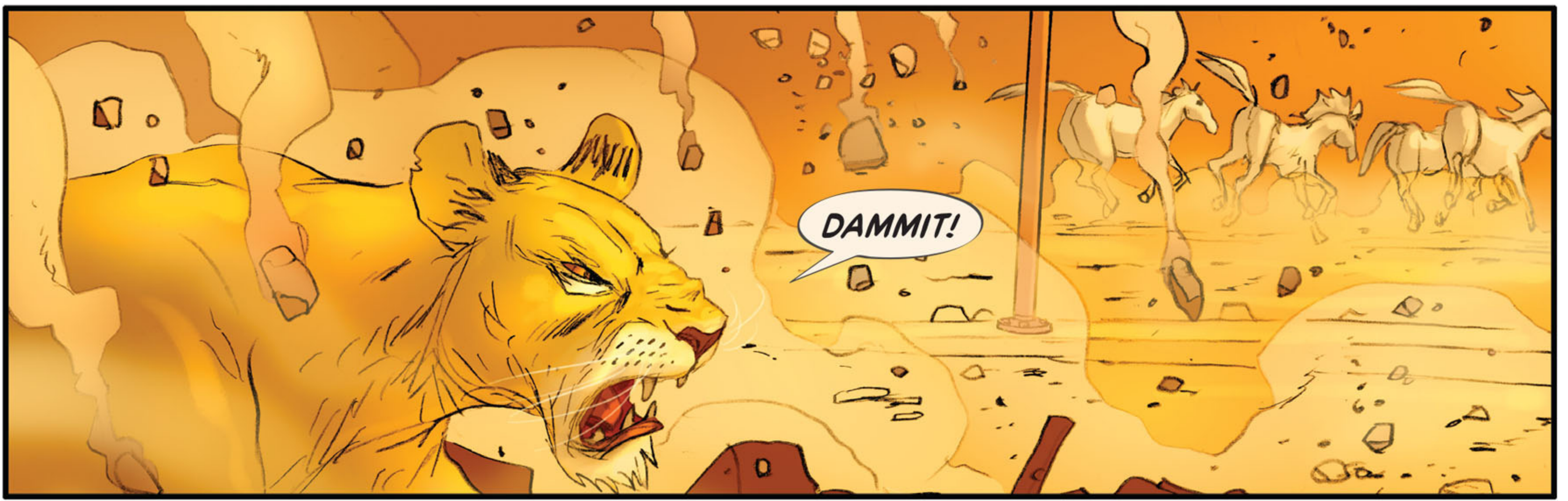
Three? What about *me*? I can kill one, too!

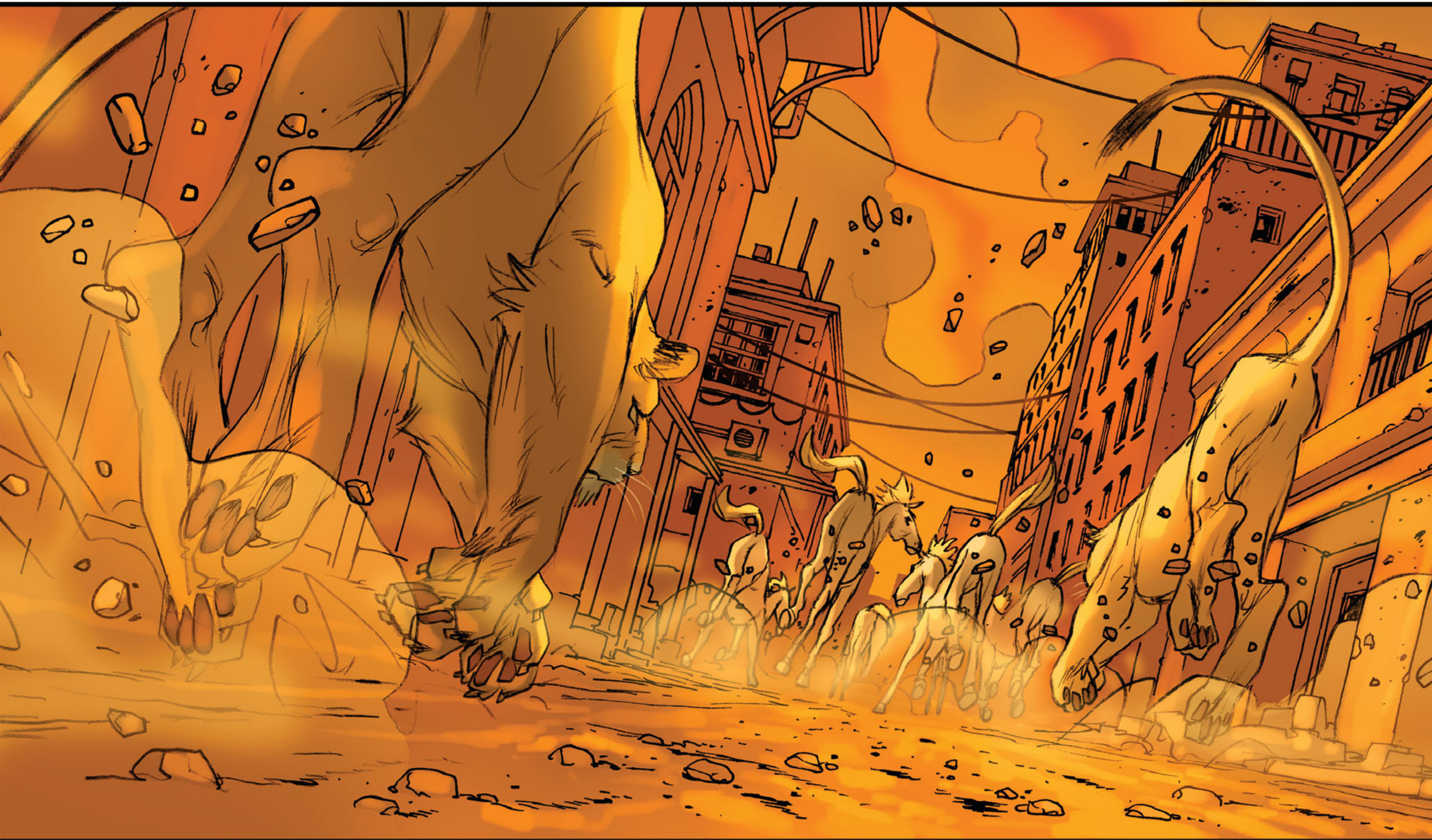
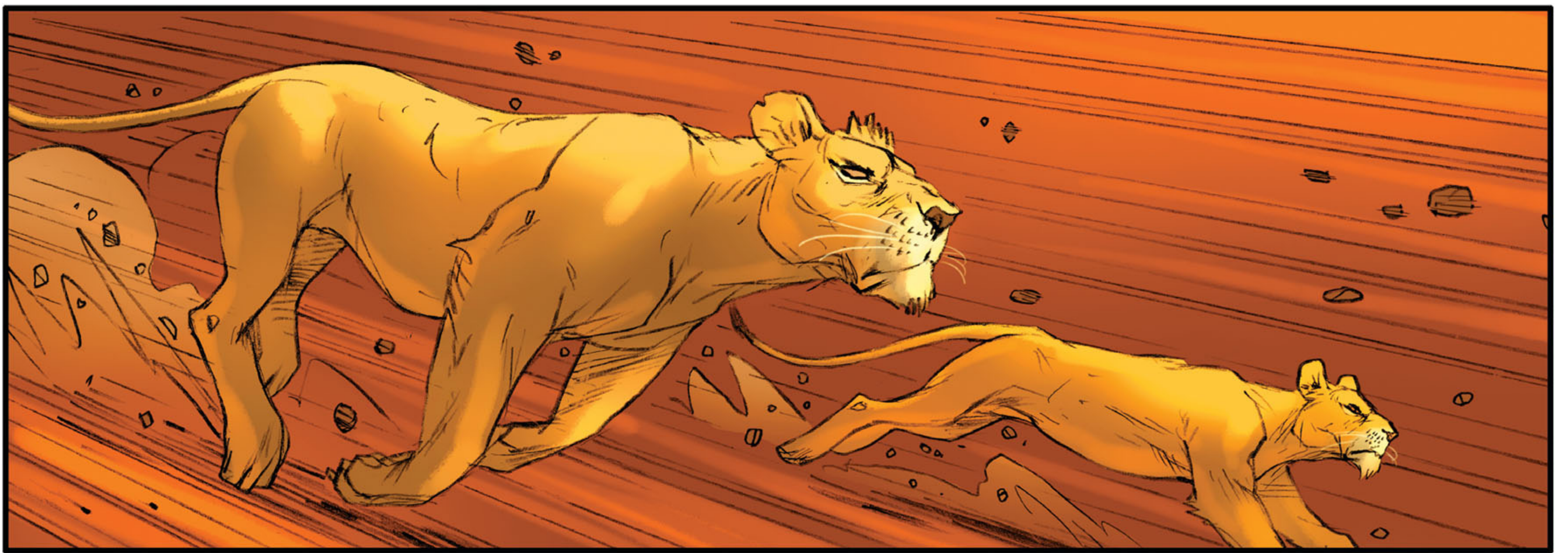


That's the spirit.

Stand by, everyone. We'll pounce on my word. Ready, set...







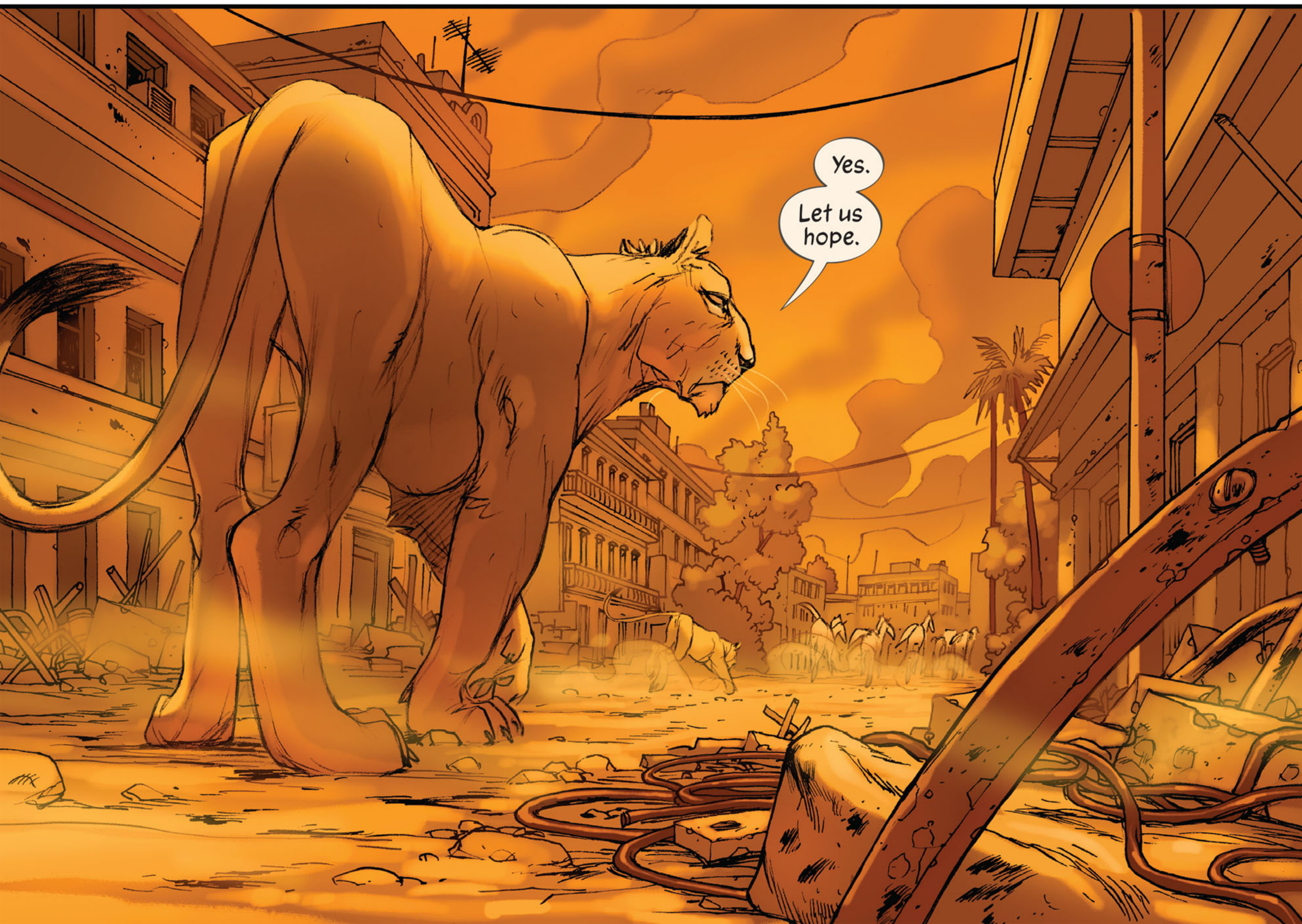
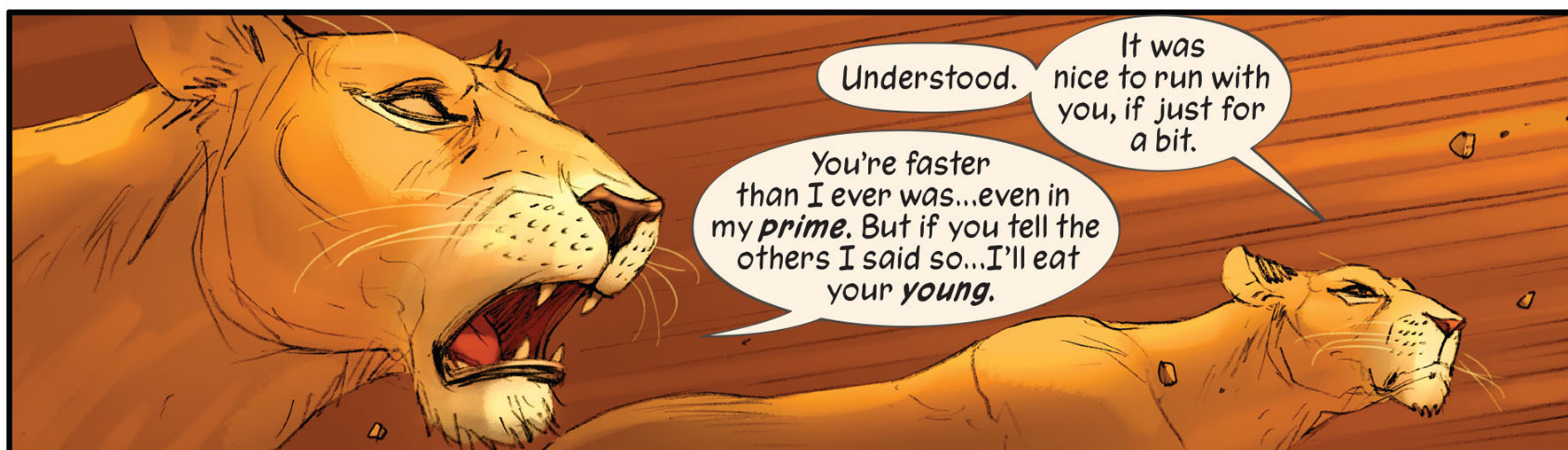
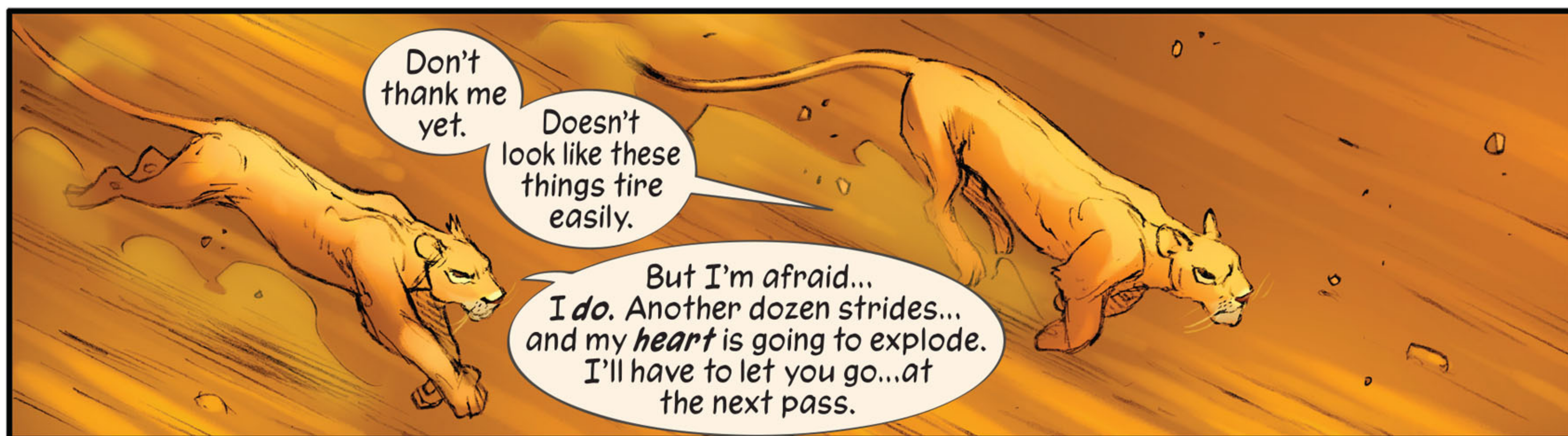
Noor...

No need
to apologize,
Safa.
We both
said stupid things
today.



Girl, if I live
to be a hundred, you'll
still never get an apology
out of *me*.

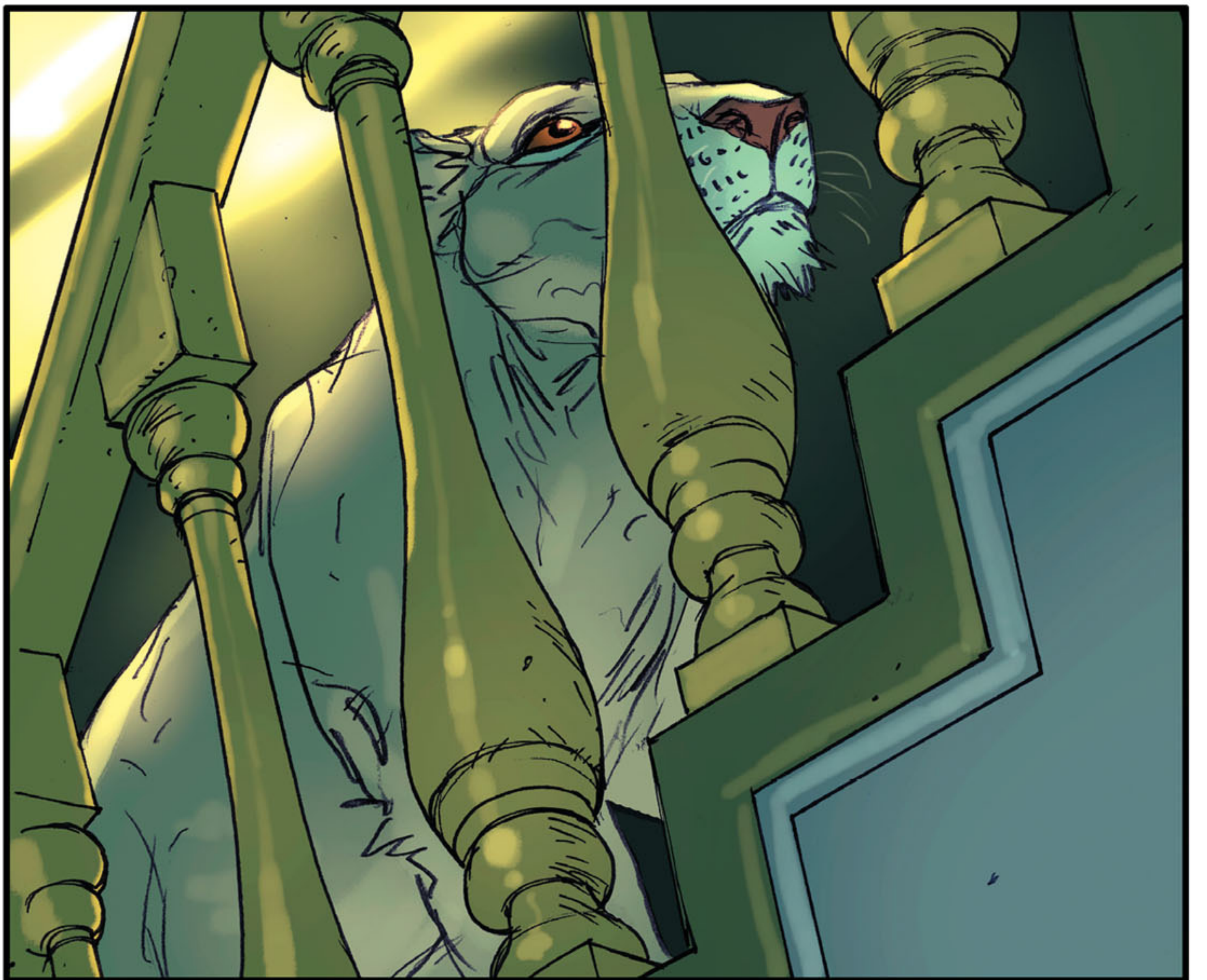
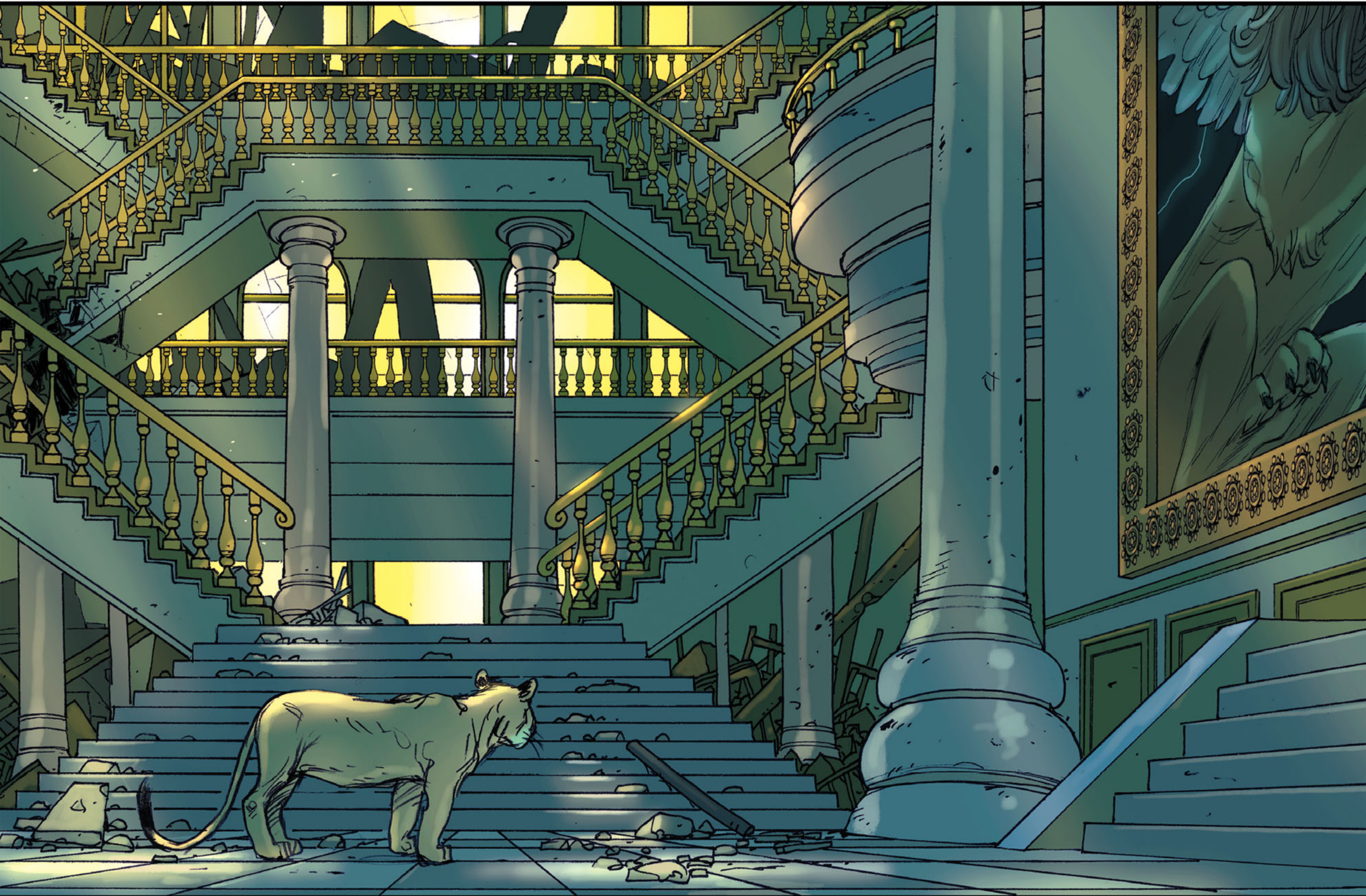
I was
just going to say...
good work.

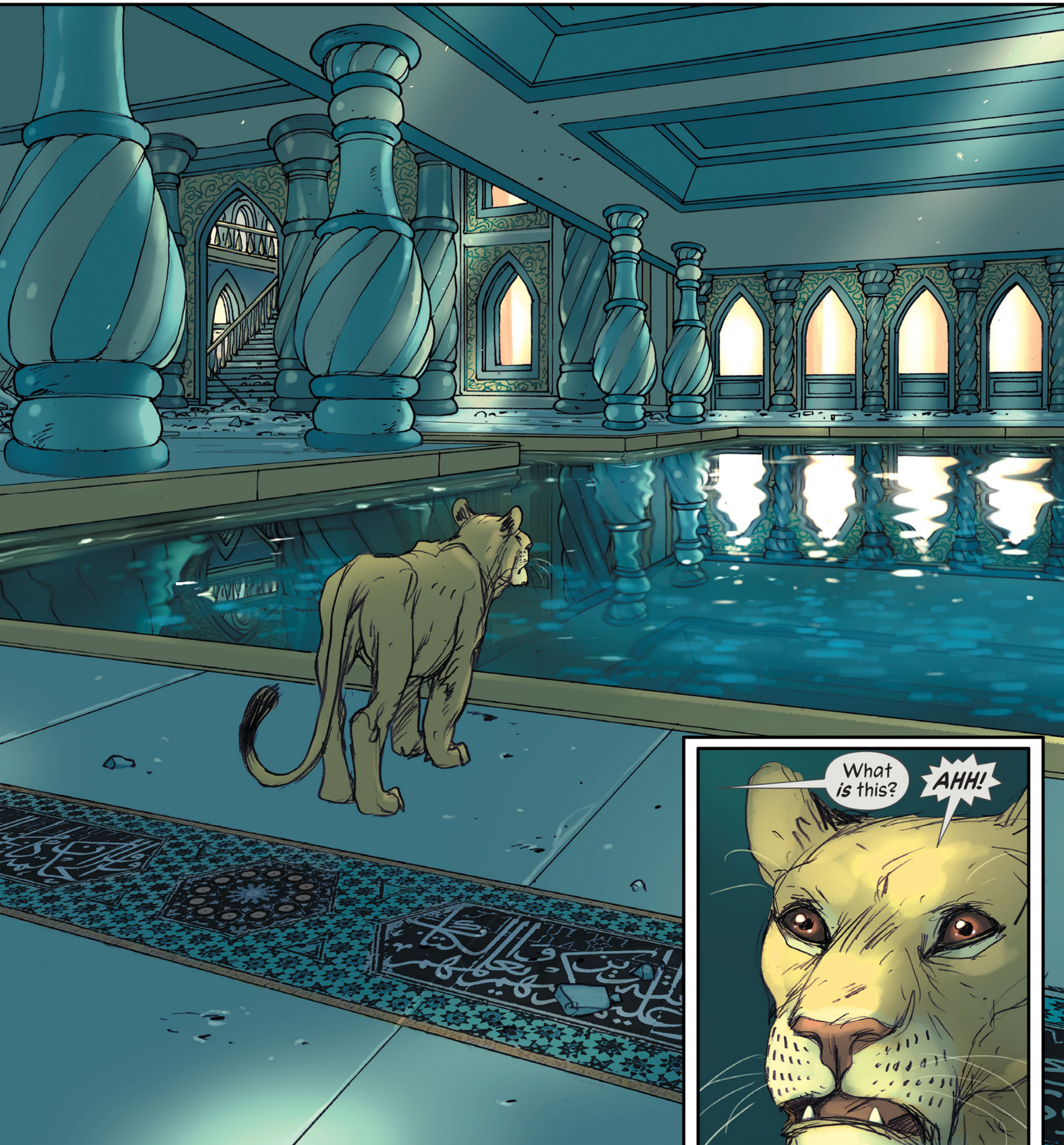
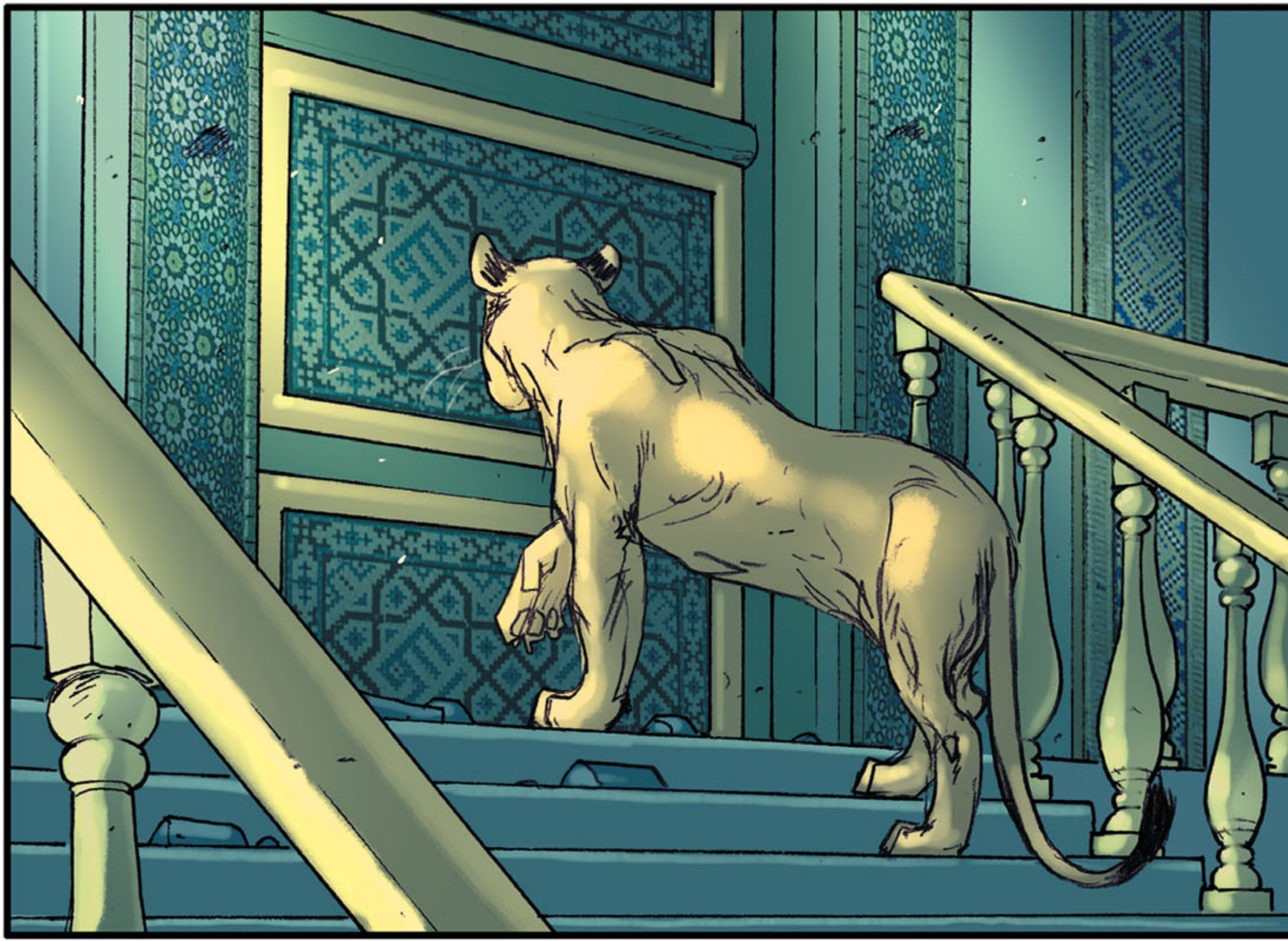






...you.







Safa.
How did
you--

I caught my
breath, then I just
followed the stench
of *fear*.

Yes, well,
this place scares
the hell out of
me.



Then
it must be
Heaven.

I
don't think
we're there
yet.

Our
own private
watering hole? The
safety of the zoo, but
the freedom to come
and go? What else
could this
be?



I think we're
in the den of the *keepers*.
This is where they must have
gone when they left *us*
at night.

If that's
the case, then
where did they
all--

Muh...master...?



Was
that...?

Those
overgrown
mules you
lost.

Hurry!

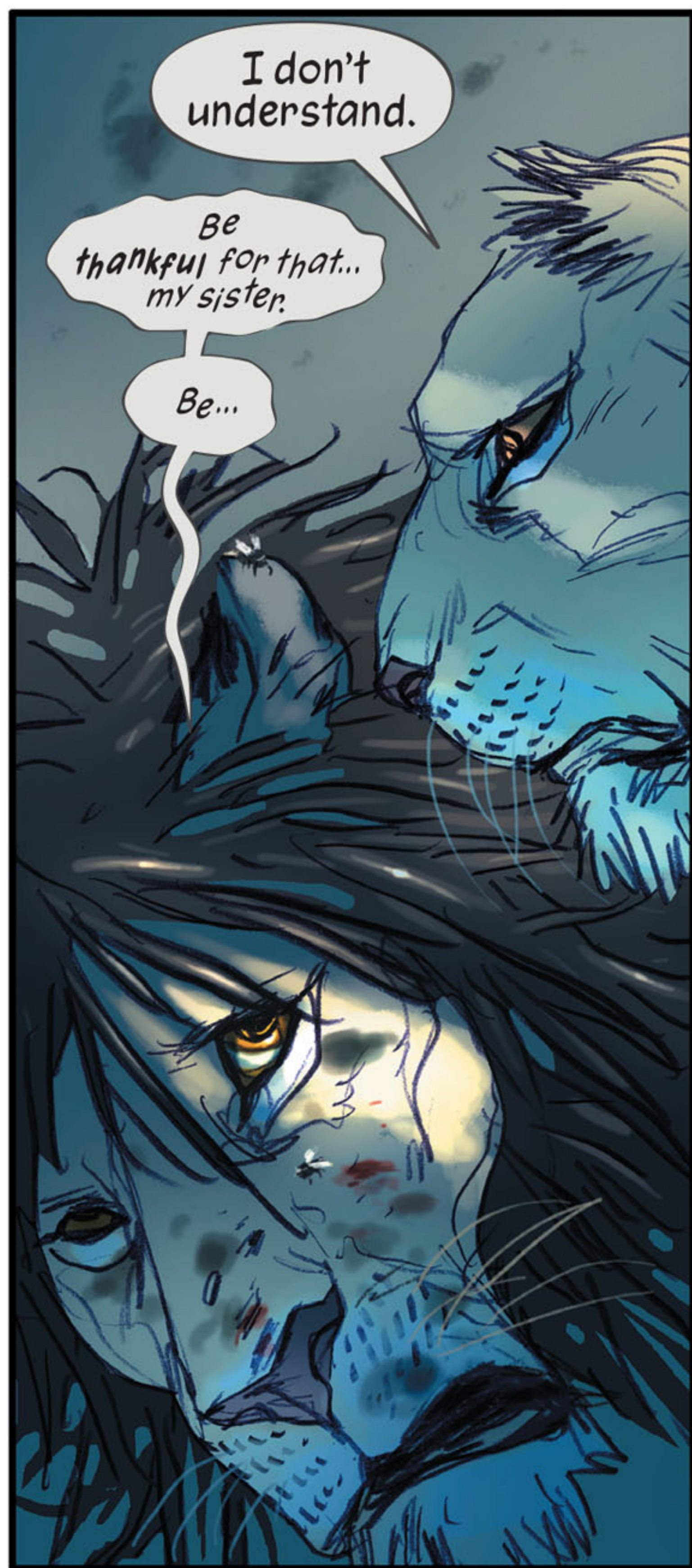




Brother,
do...do we know
you?

Not if
you still have your
claws...Your
teeth...

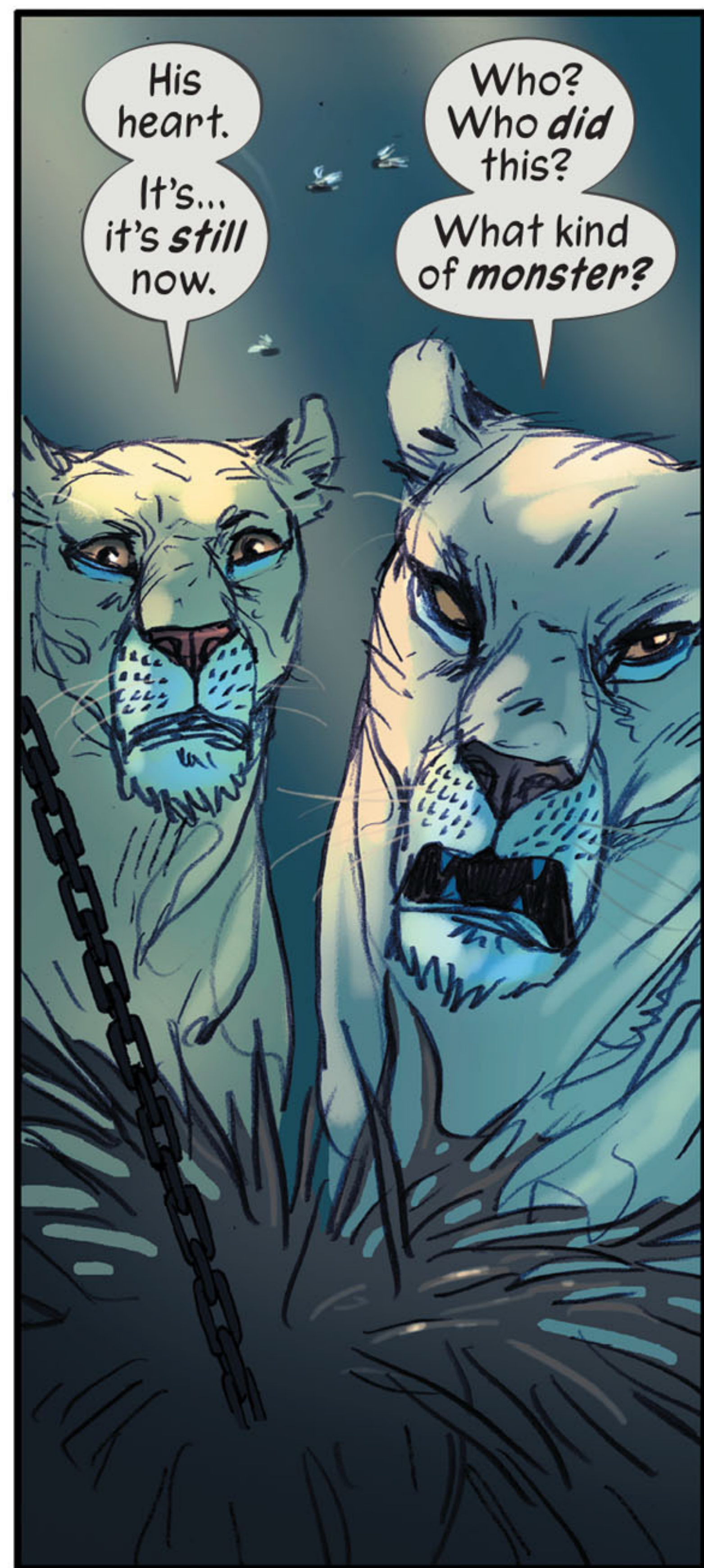
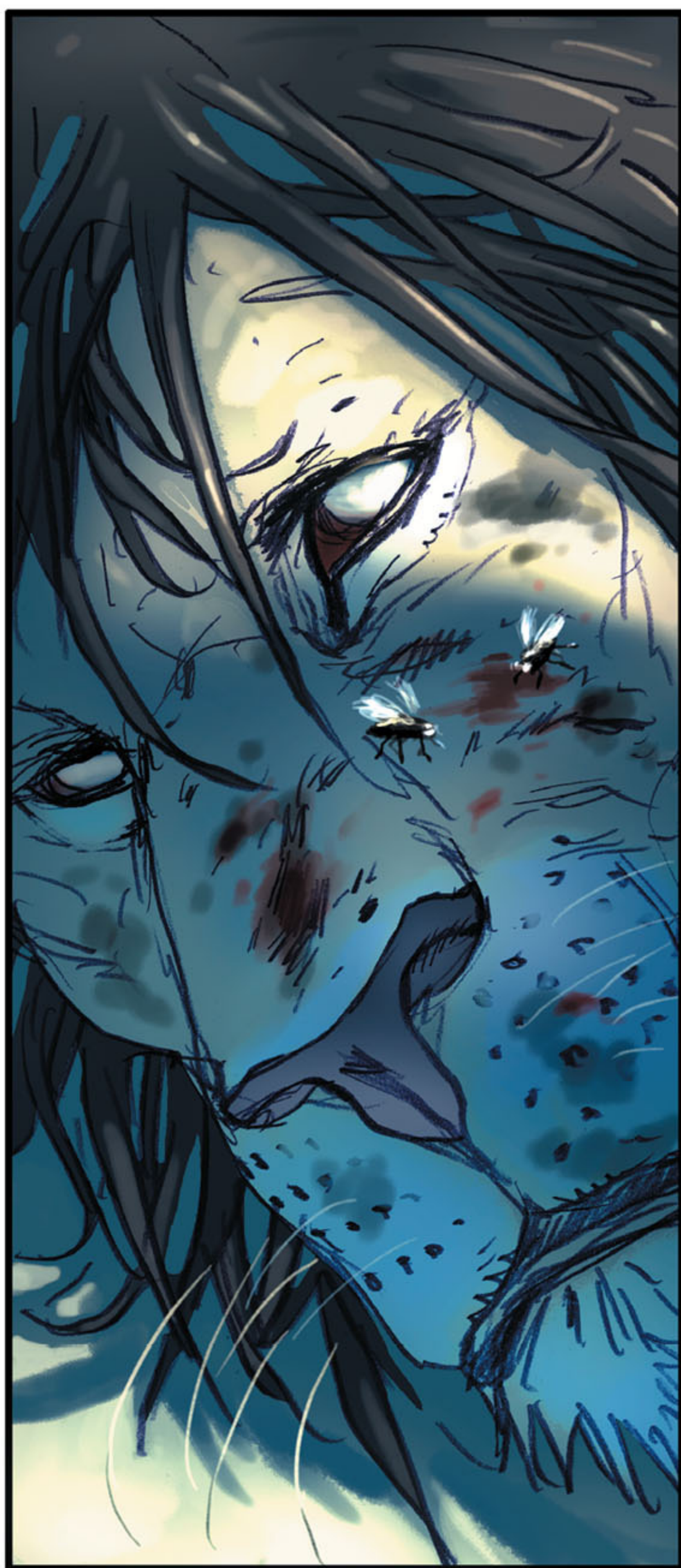
You were
never...on his
list...



I don't
understand.

Be
thankful for that...
my sister.

Be...



His
heart.

It's...
it's *still*
now.

Who?
Who *did*
this?

What kind
of *monster*?



Remember last spring, when we heard rumors of creatures from other cages being *disappeared*? This must be where the keepers brought them.

You're... you're wrong. They may have been our captors, but they weren't *torturers*.



You have another word for whips and chains?

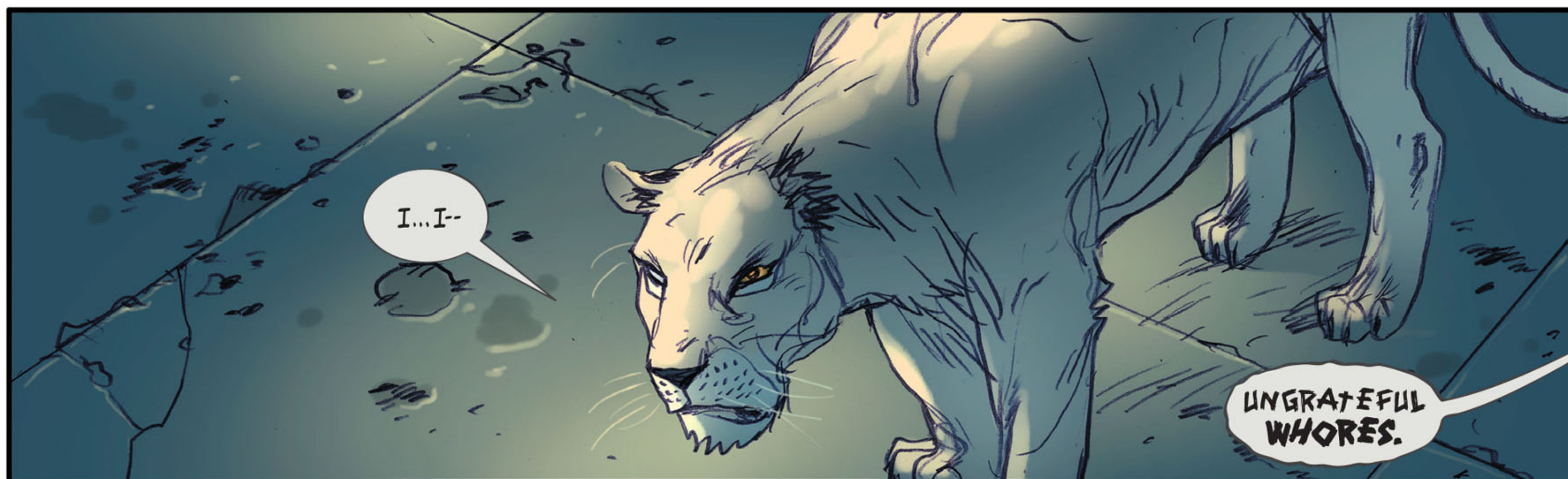
Even if the keepers *did* do this, it wasn't *our* keepers.

They weren't evil.



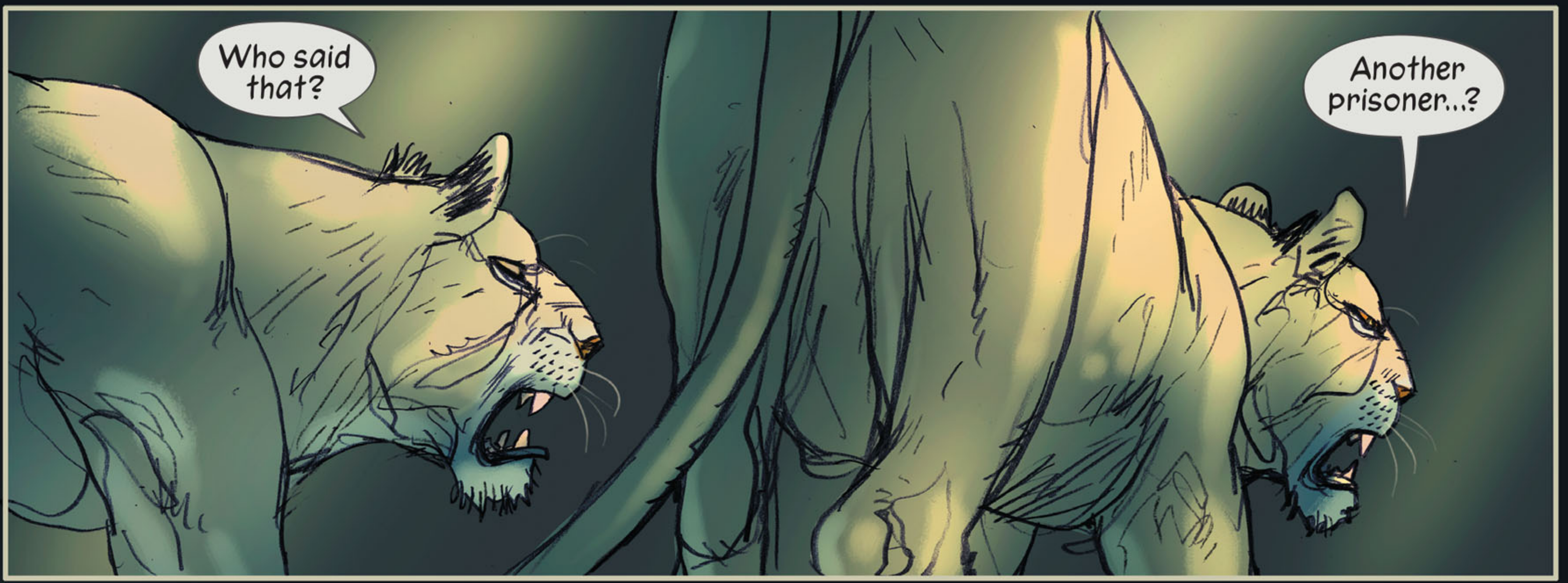
Safa, no matter how they might treat us, those who would hold us captive are *always* tyrants.

If we had *remained* as we were, we would have ended up hanging from a leash just like this poor bastard... and you know it as well as I.



I...I--

UNGRATEFUL WHORES.



Who said that?

Another prisoner...?

RASHID WASN'T A PRISONER, HE WAS A PET...AND HE LIVED JUST AS COMFORTABLY AS YOU SPOILED PUSSYCATS EVER DID.



Liar.

He's nothing but skin and bones.

YES, WELL, I MAY HAVE ACCIDENTALLY EATEN A FEW OF HIS MEALS.



MY NAME IS FAJER, BY THE BY.

I'M THE MAN OF THE HOUSE NOW, BUT PLEASE...



...DON'T
GET UP.





Quiet,
girl.

What kind
of demon *are*
you?



A
MERCIFUL
ONE.

IF EITHER
OF YOU WILLINGLY
SUBMITS HERSELF TO
MY JAWS, I'LL LET THE
OTHER GO. FIGHT ME,
AND I DESTROY
YOU BOTH.



You go
for his balls,
I'll open his
throat.

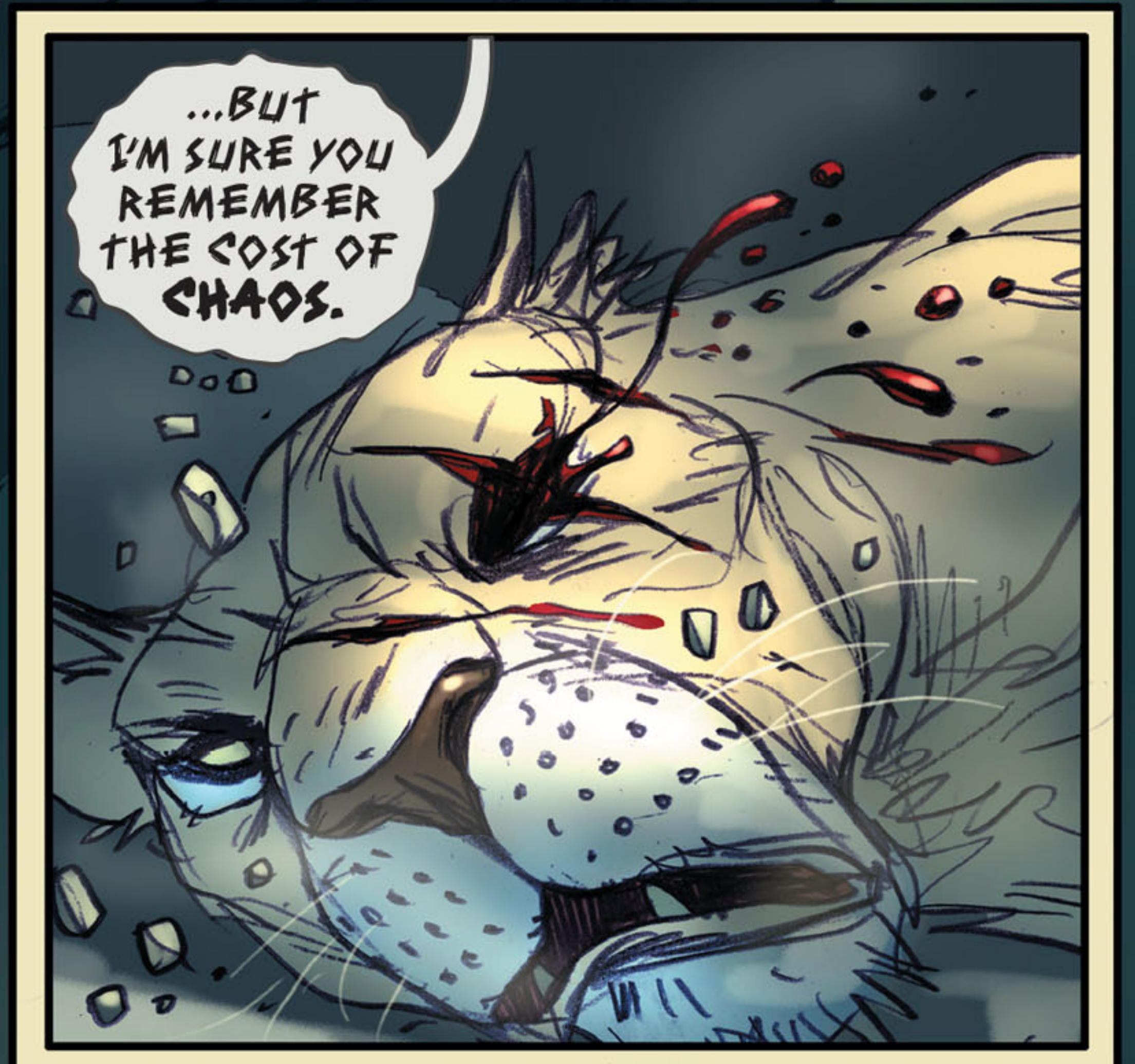
Right.



HH.

I HOPE
YOU'RE LESS
GAMEY THAN
THE HORSES.

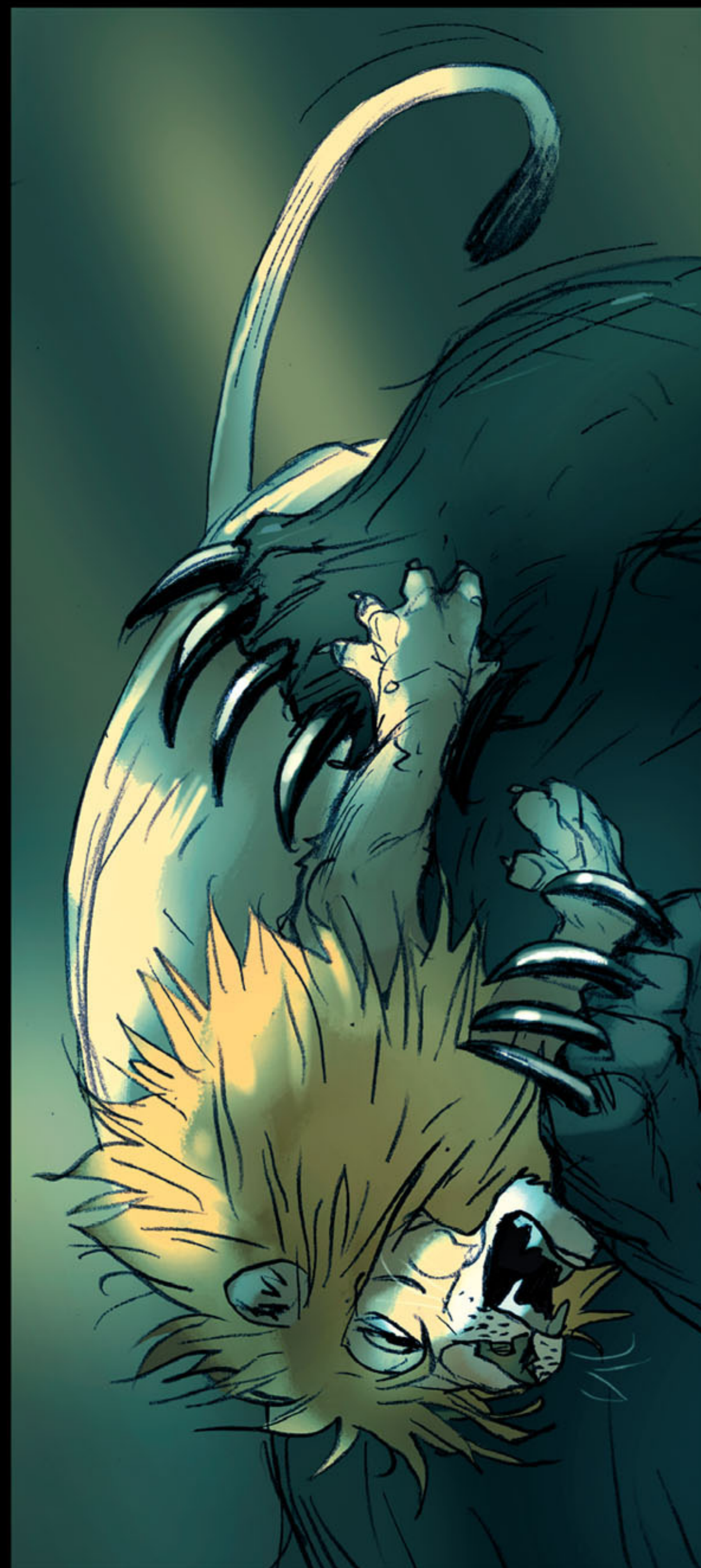




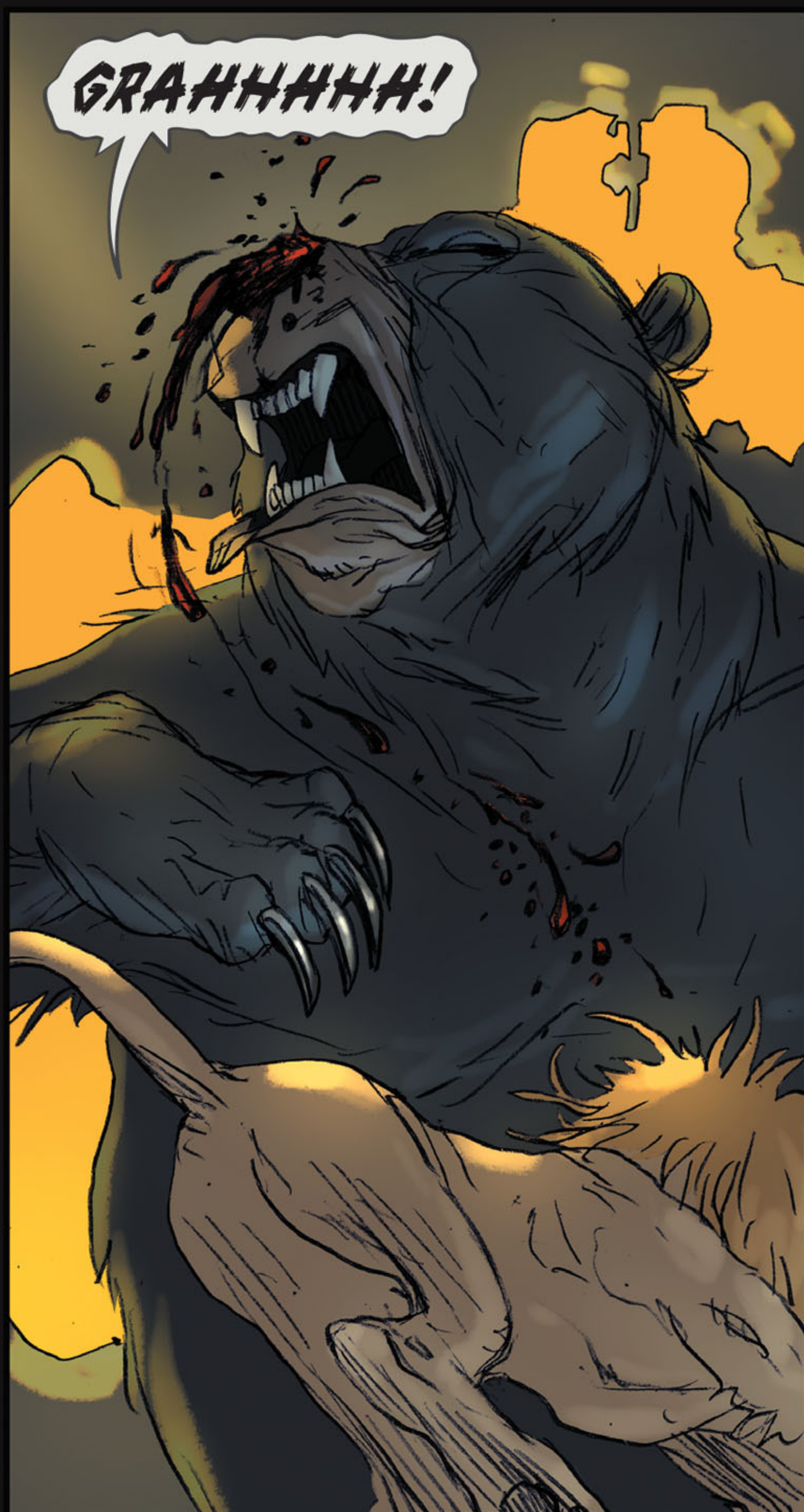


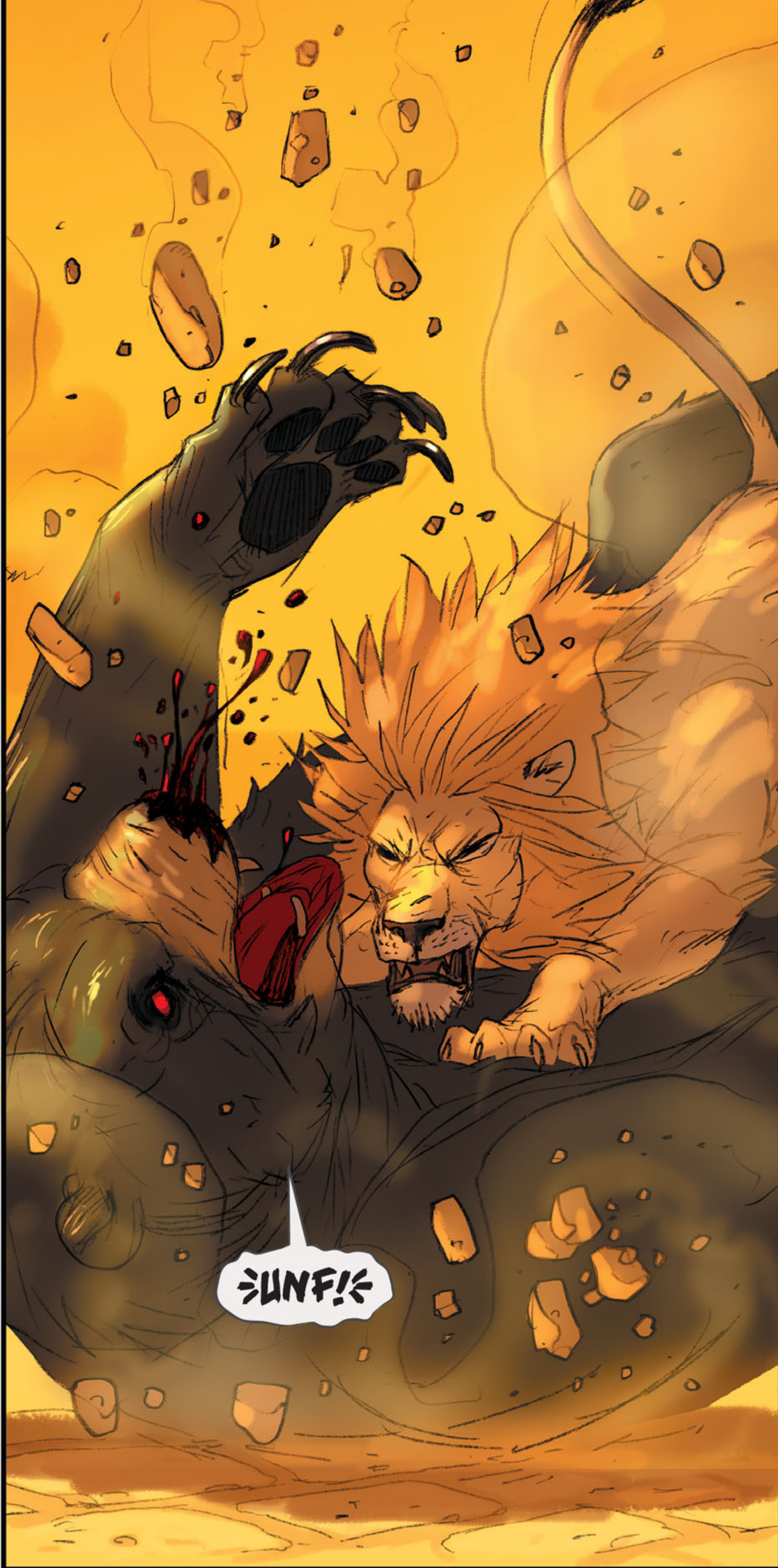


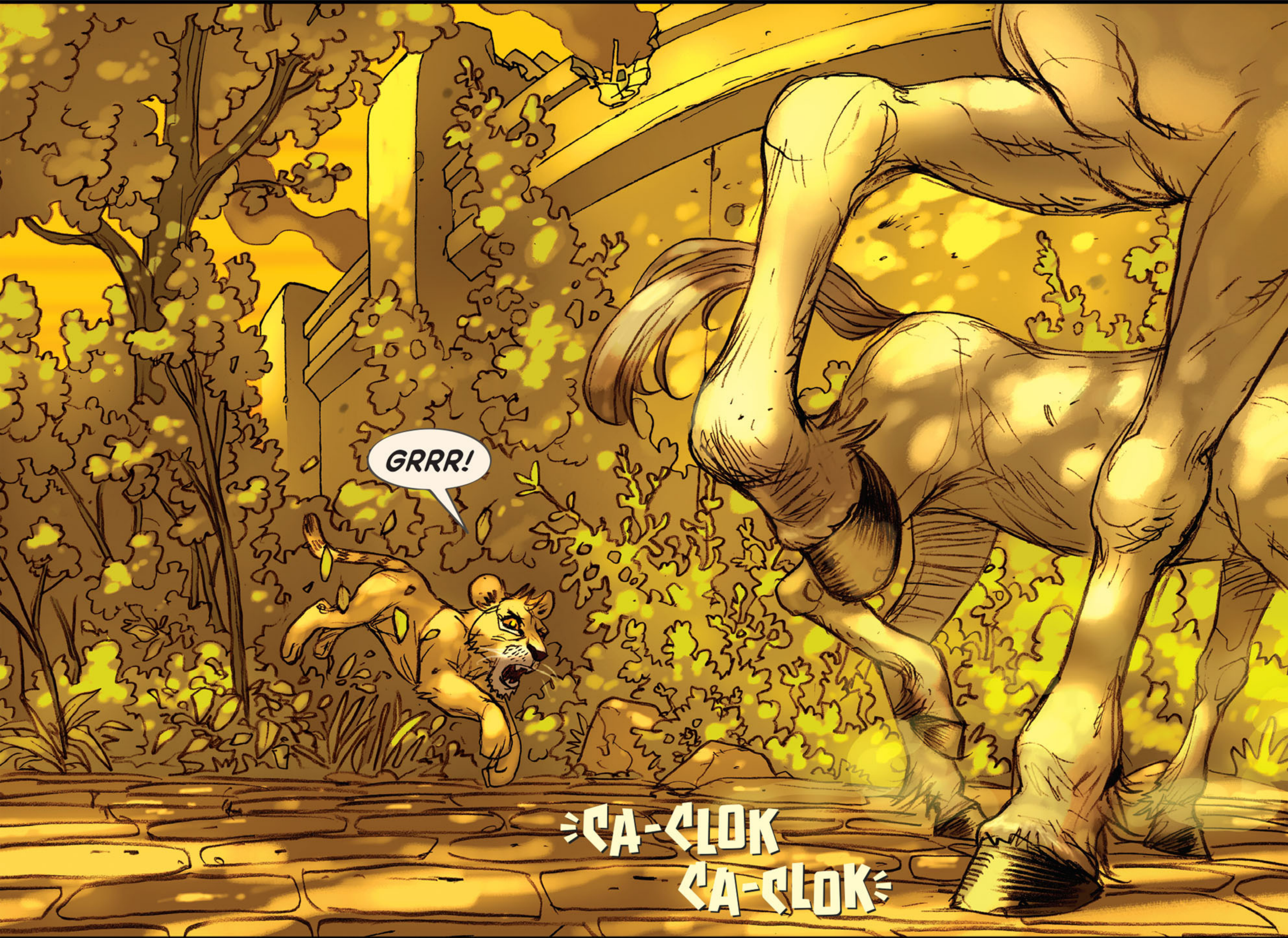
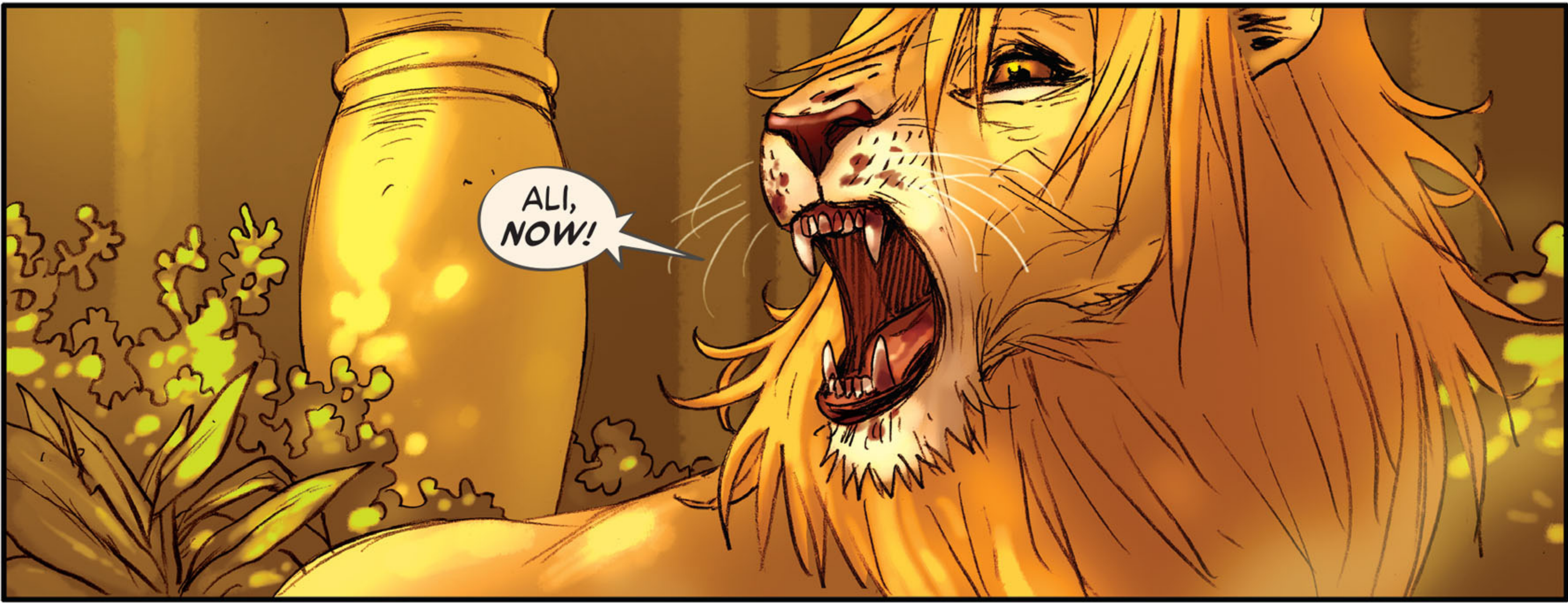










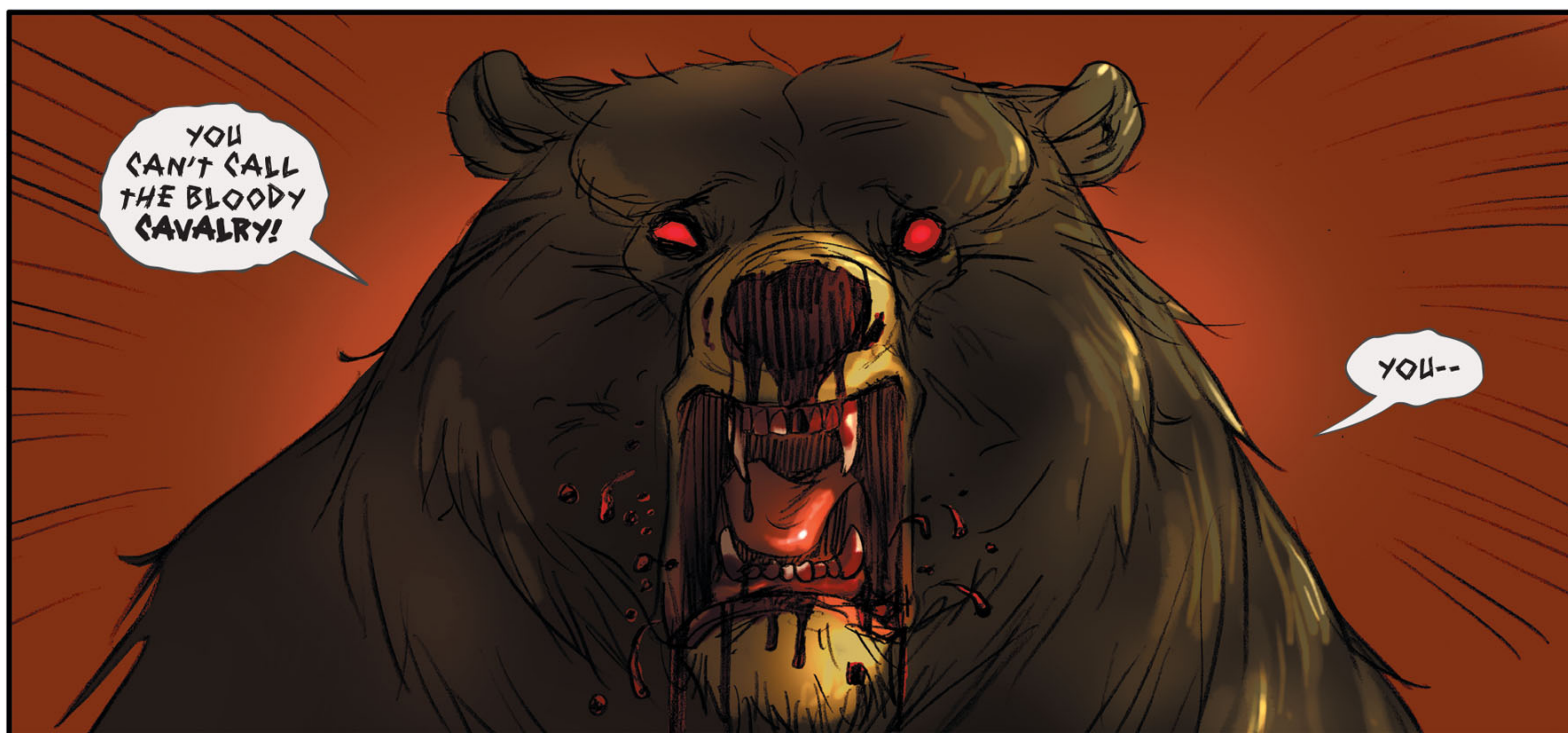




Run!
Or I'll...
I'll eat your
TONGUES!

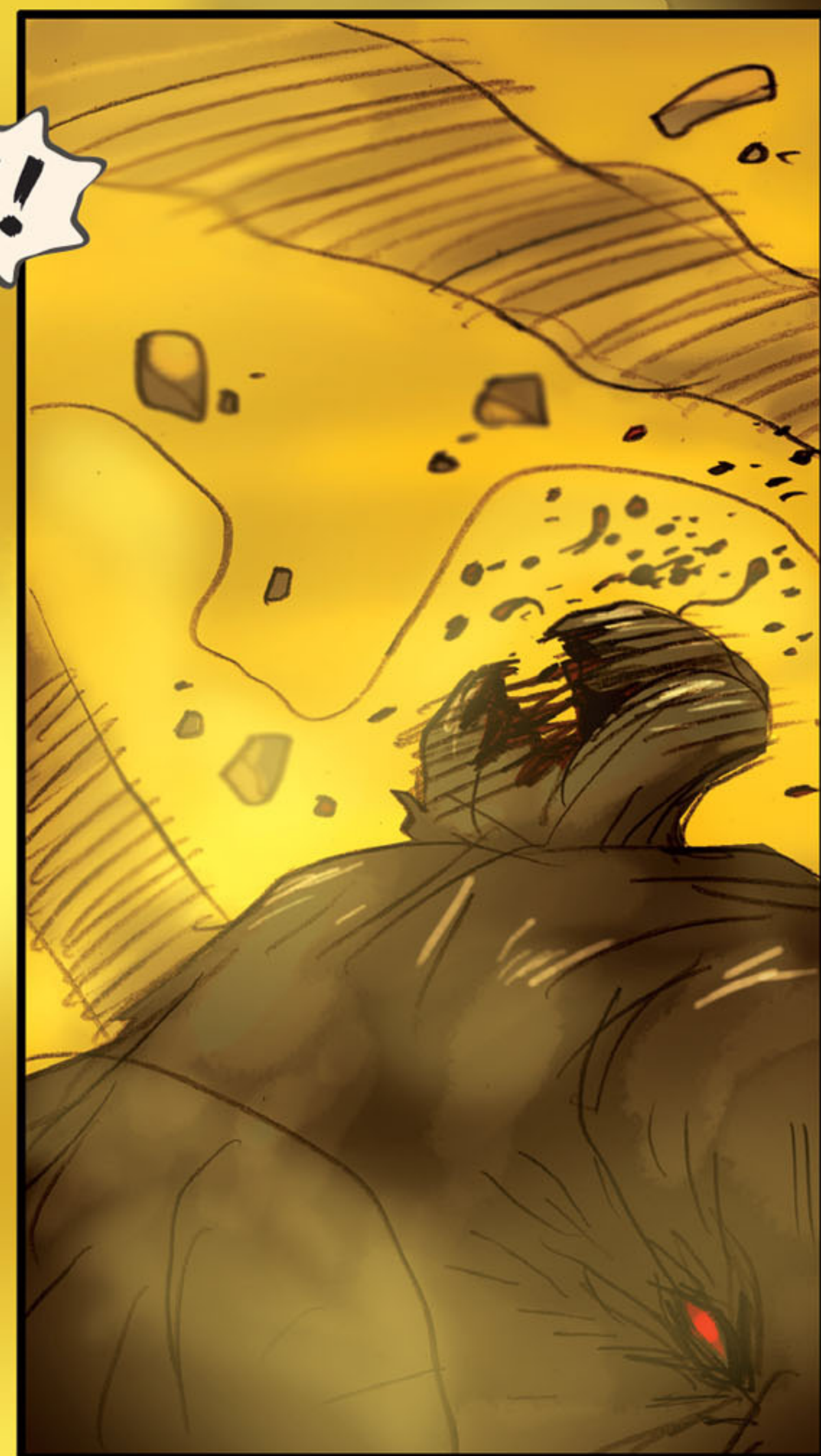
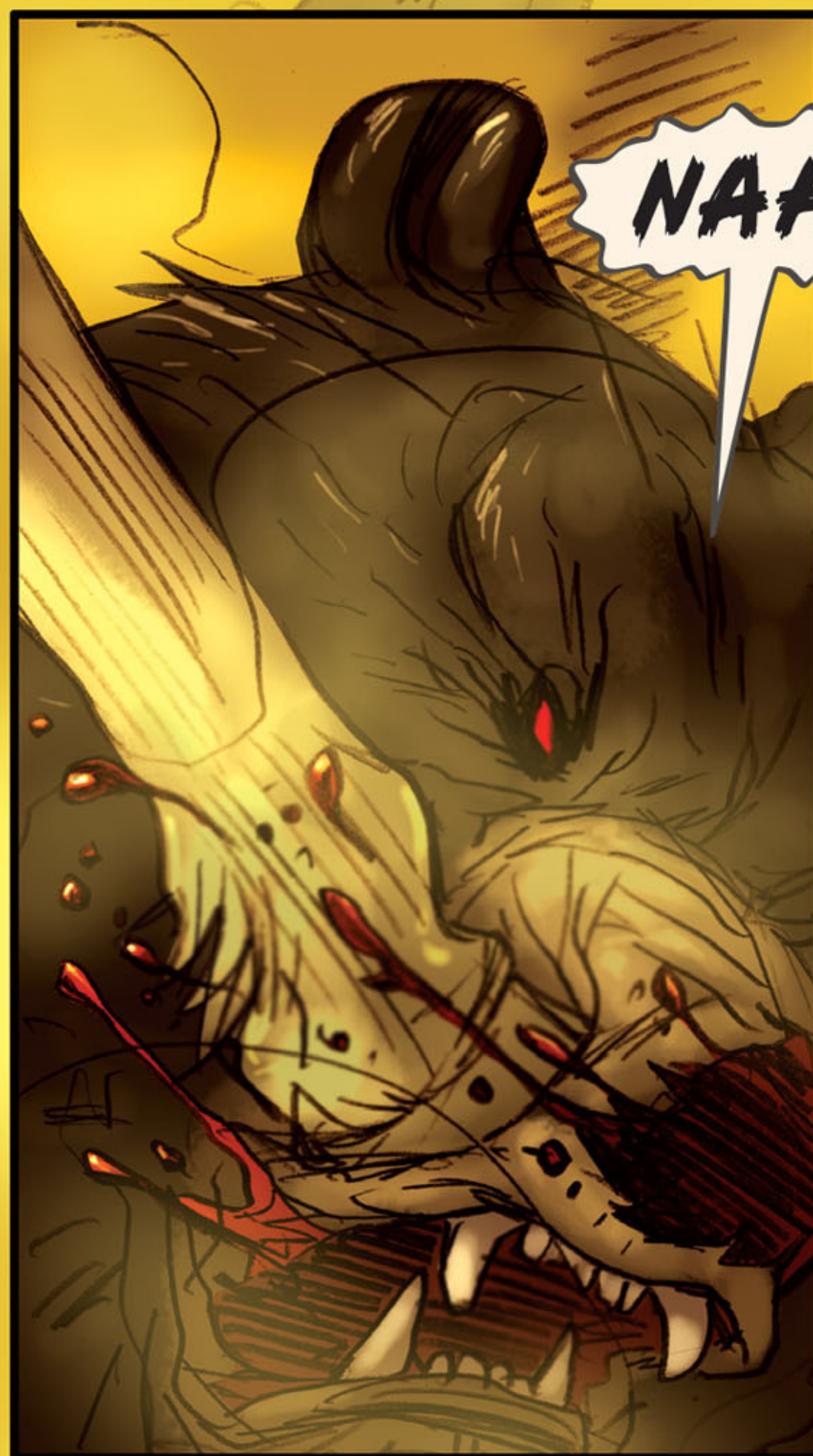
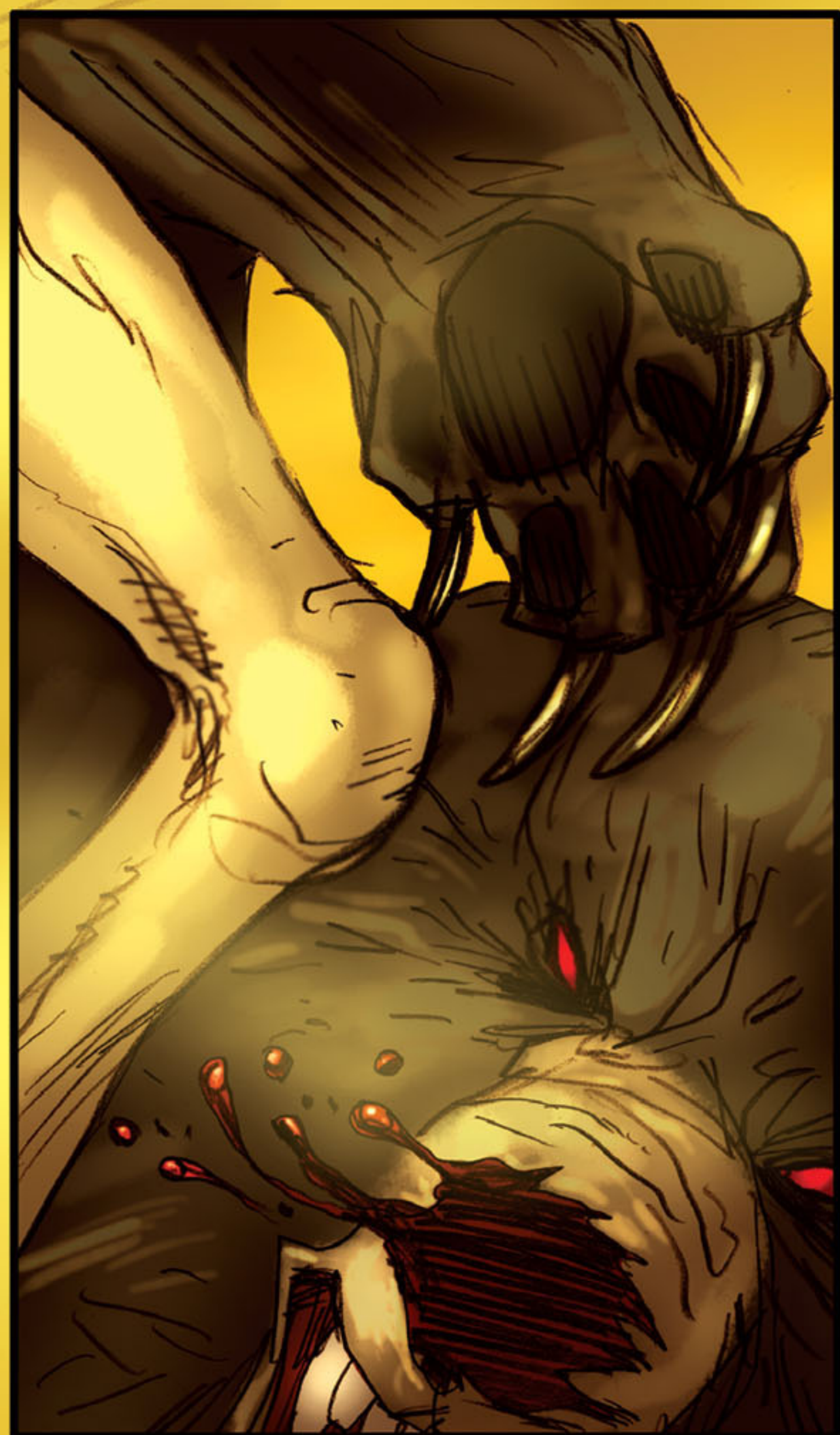


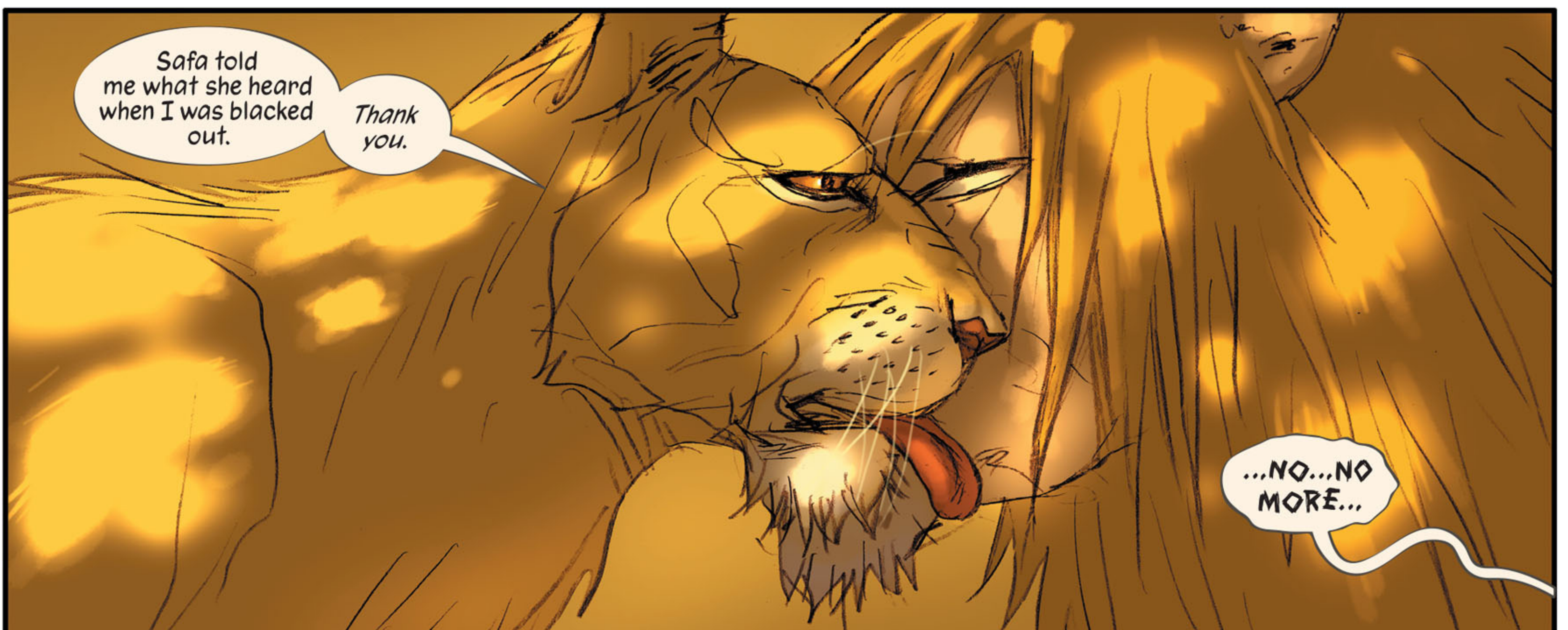
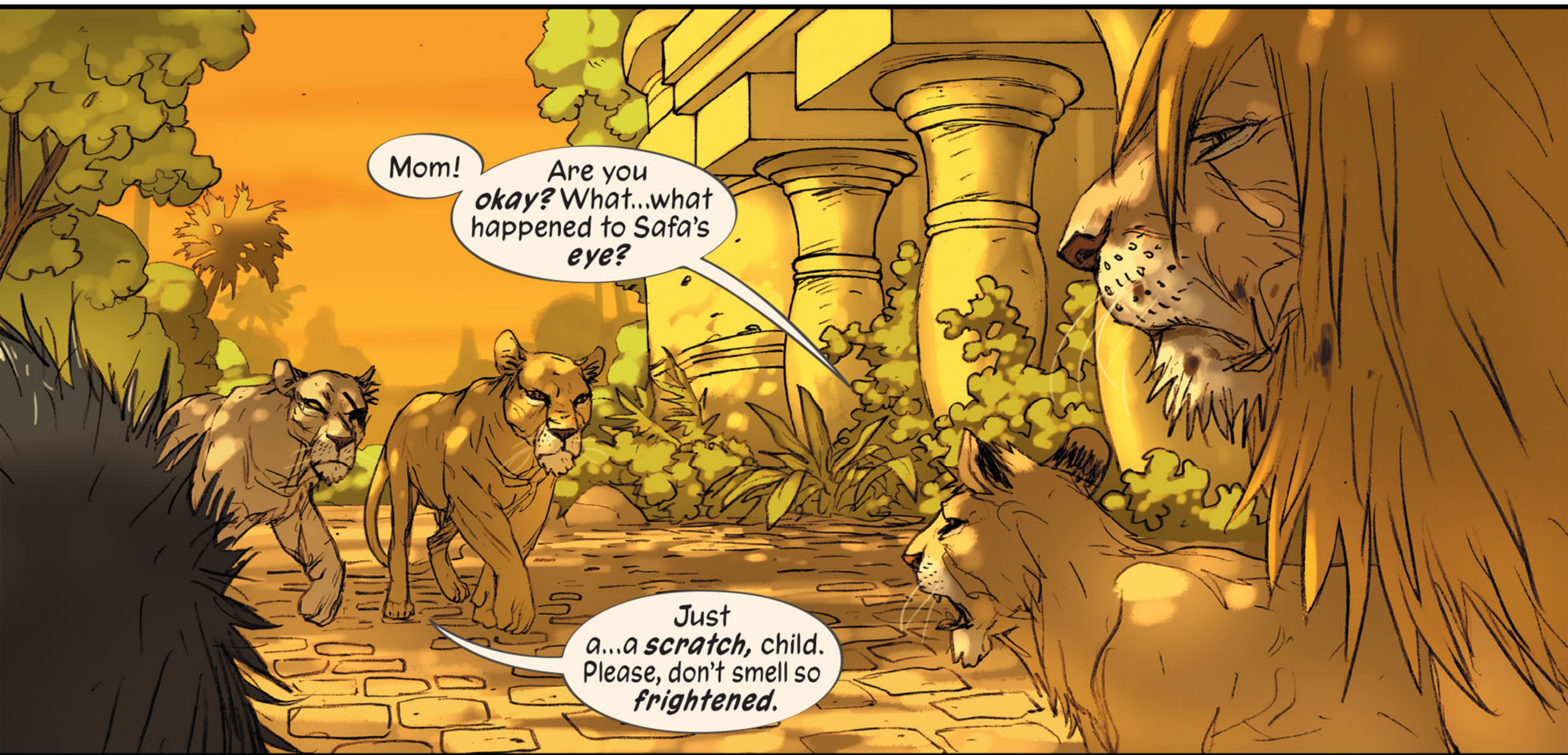
WHAT
THE HELL IS
THIS?



YOU
CAN'T CALL
THE BLOODY
CAVALRY!

YOU--







...MY
SPINE...IS IN
TWO...

...END ME...
ALREADY...



Happily.

No.

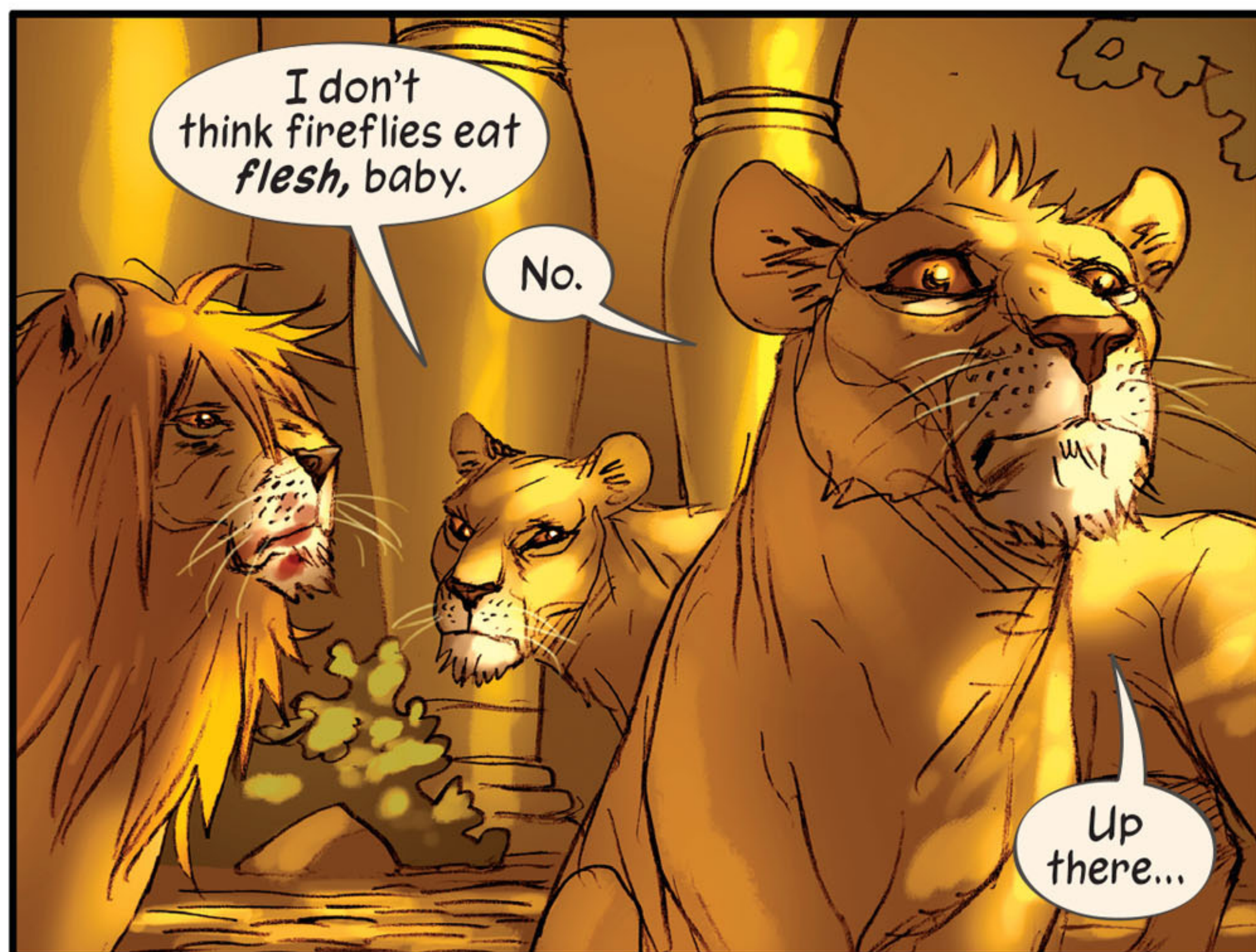
What?
Now you're the
one with the delicate
appetite?



He doesn't
deserve a quick
finish.

Leave
what's left
of him for the
camel spiders
and the--

Fireflies!



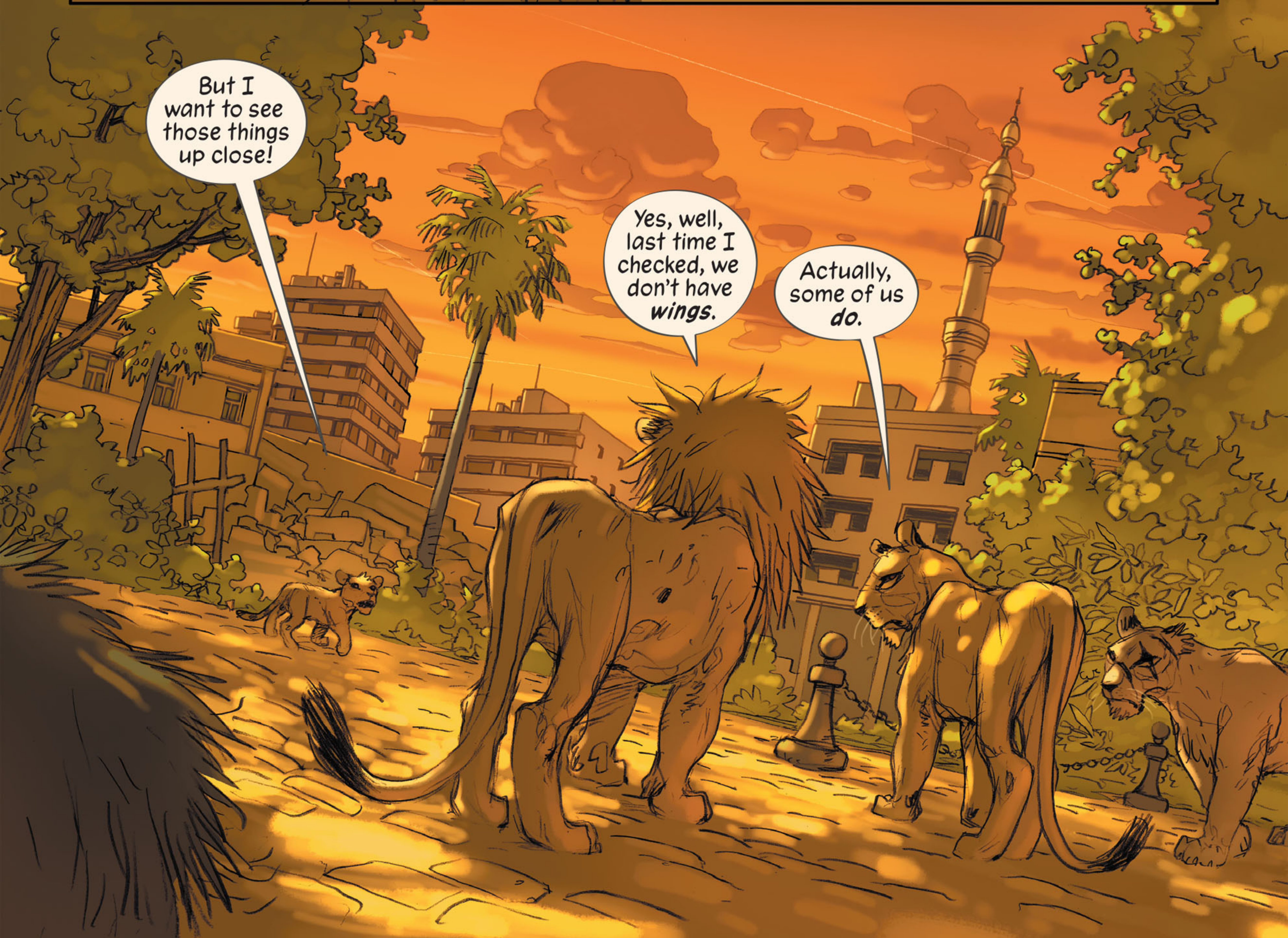
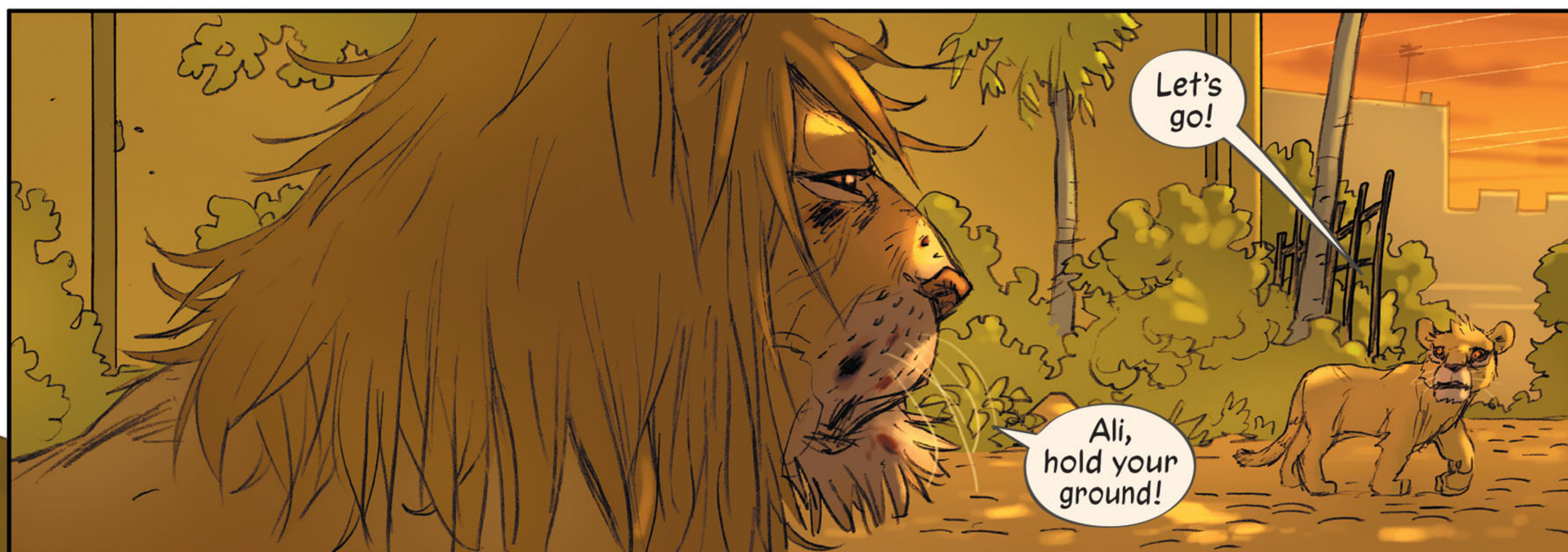
I don't
think fireflies eat
flesh, baby.

No.

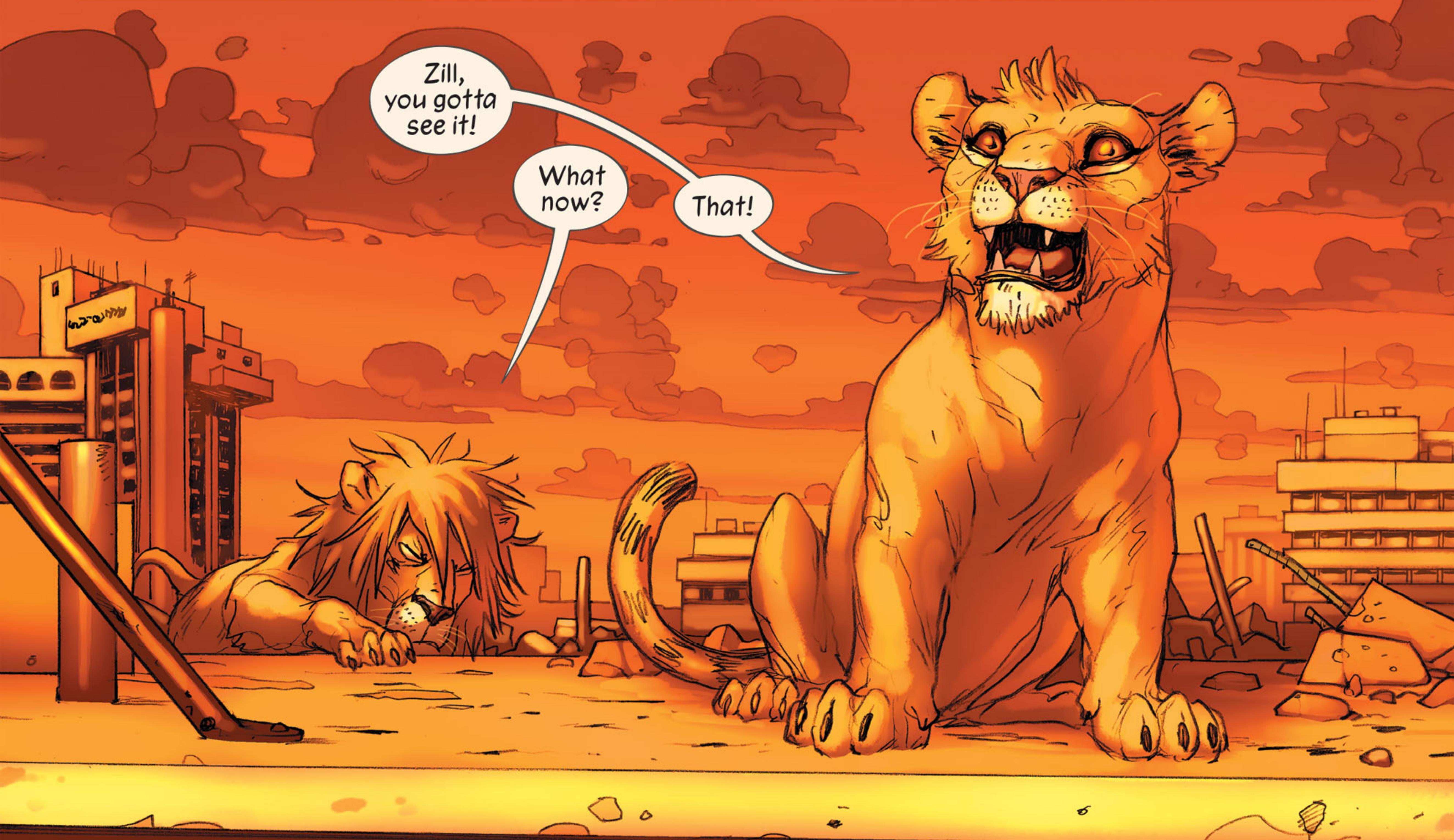
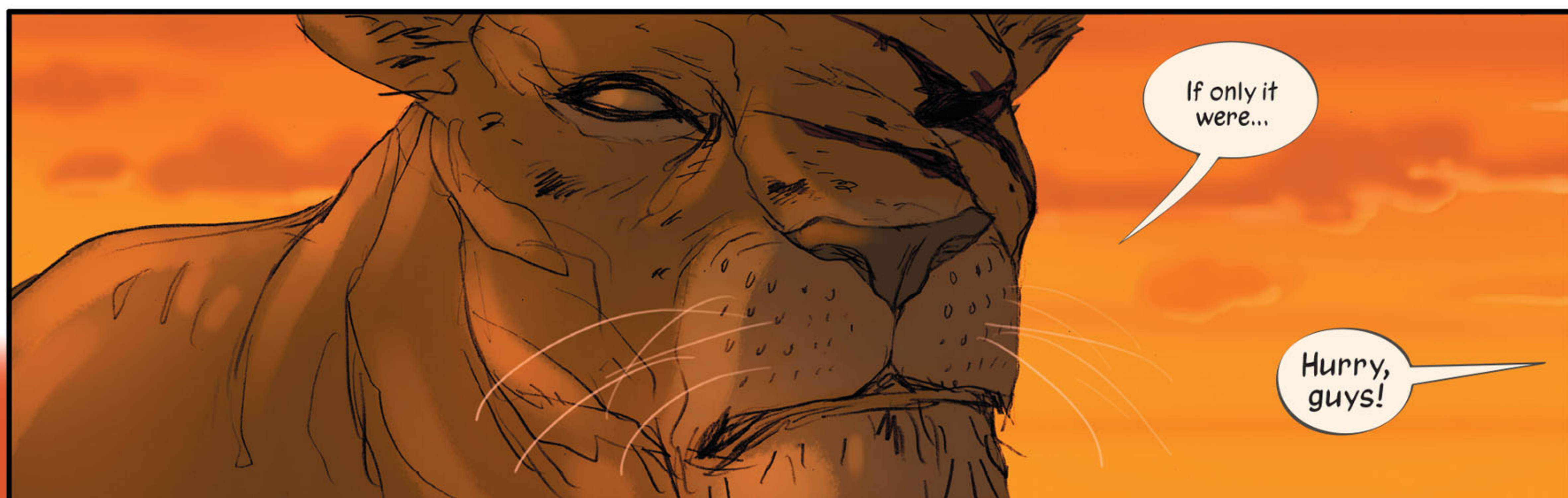
Up
there...



Fireflies.

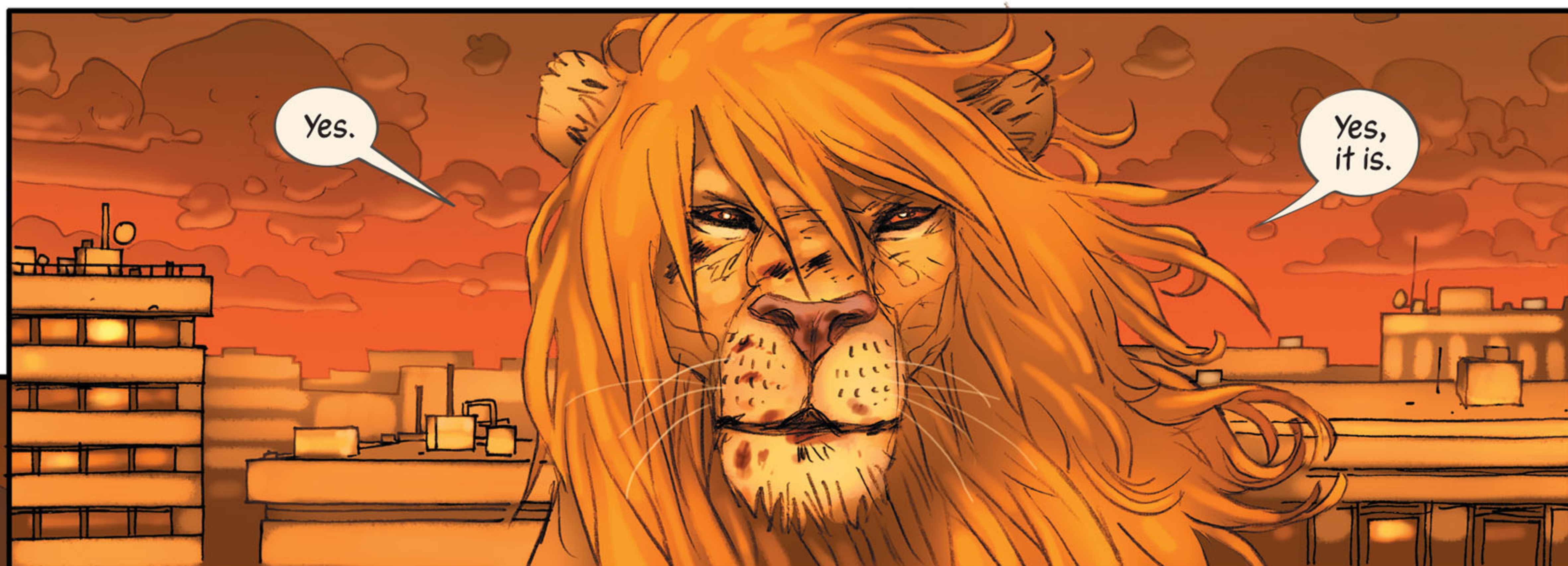






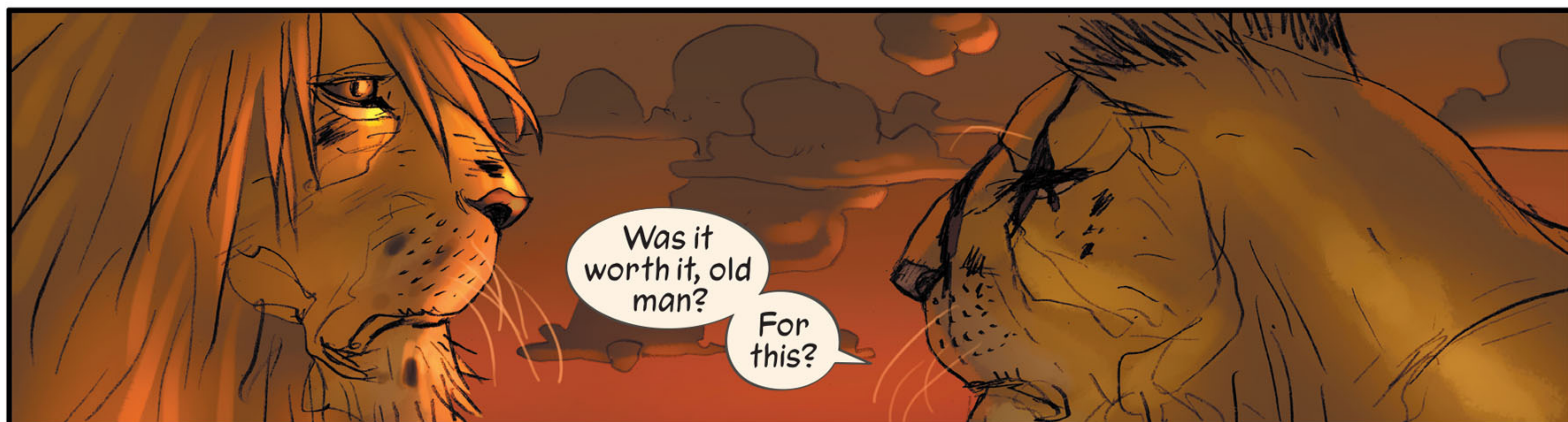


Is *that* a horizon?



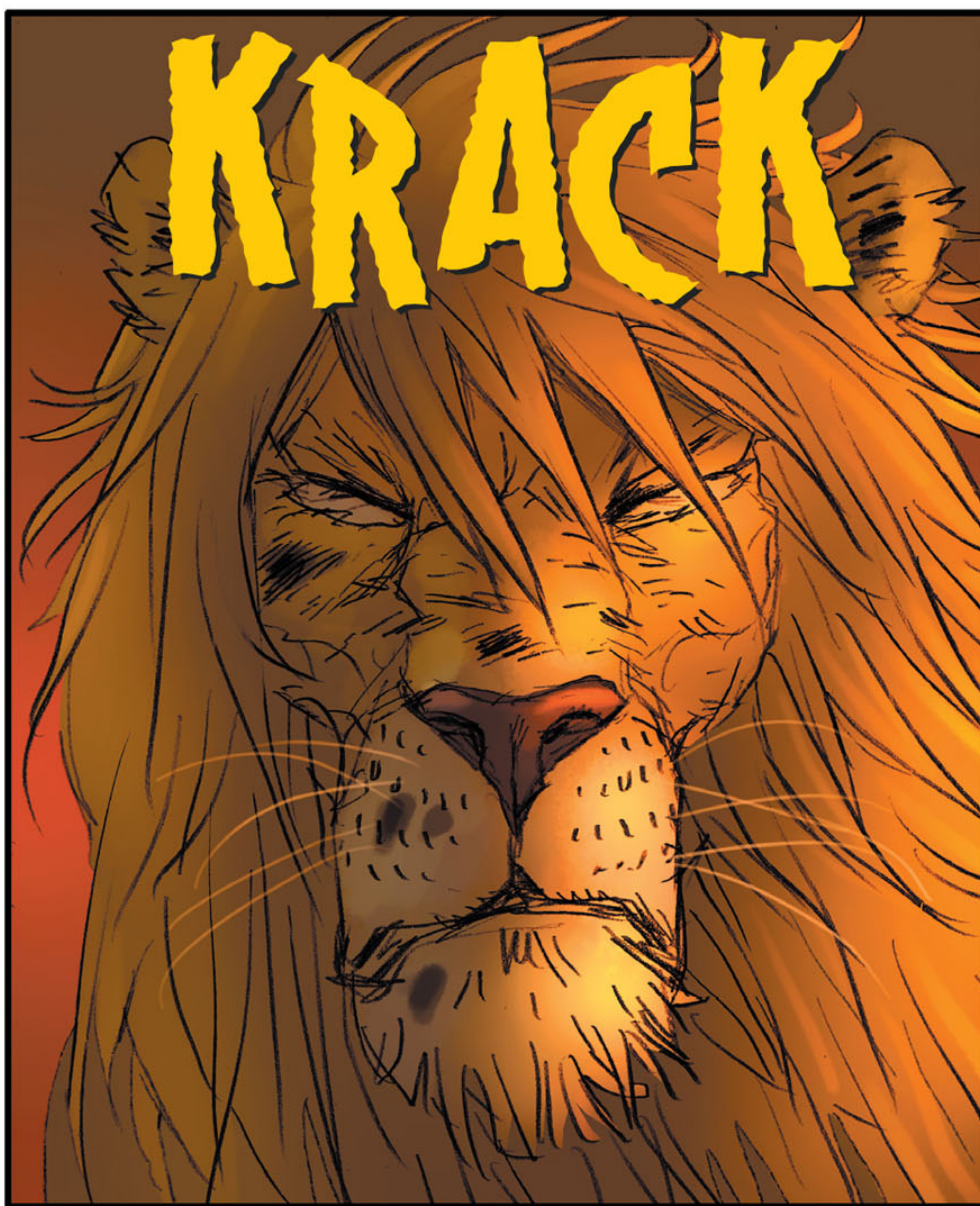


So.

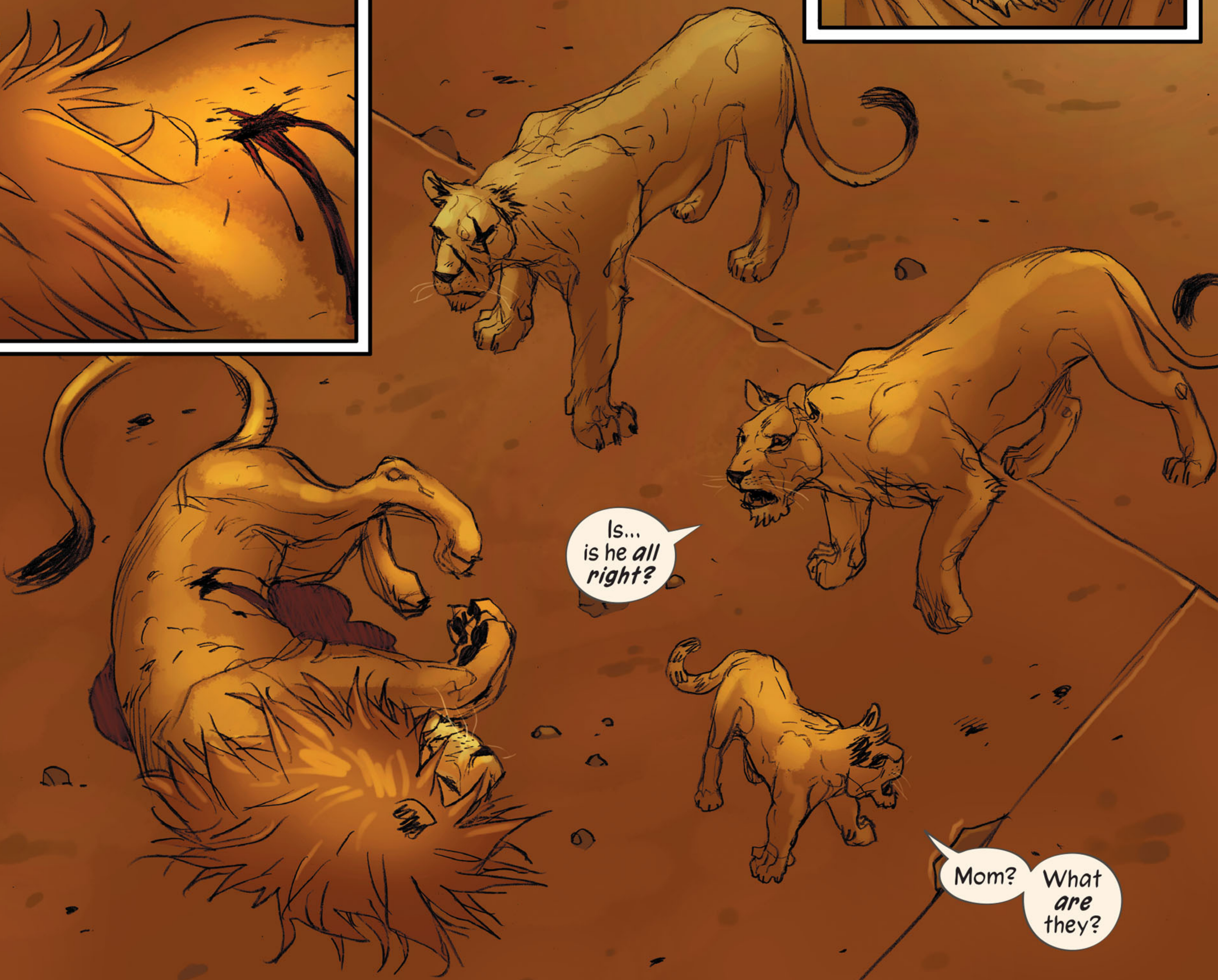


Was it worth it, old man?

For this?

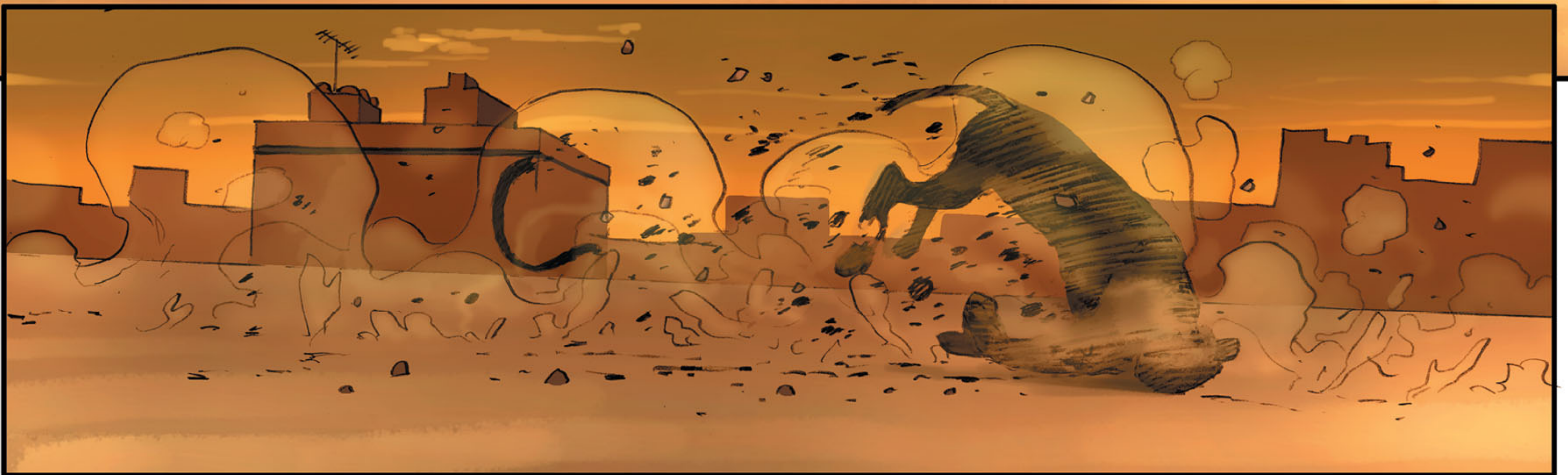


KRACK

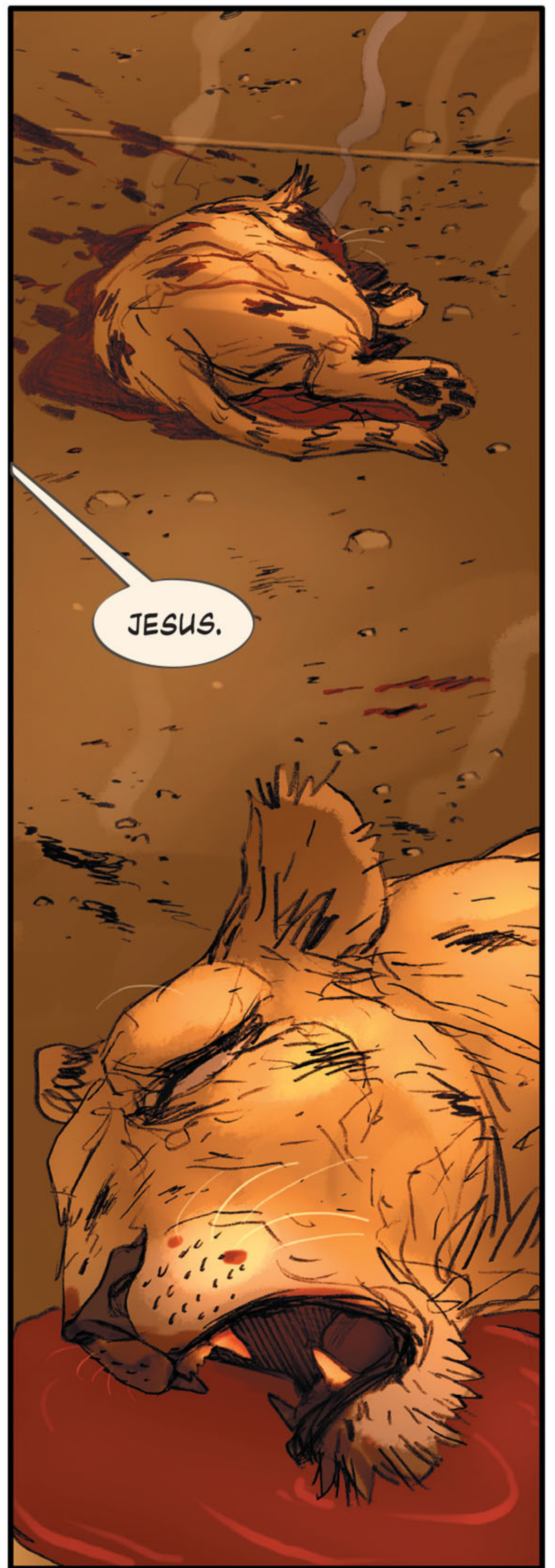




KRAKKA KRAKKA KRAKKA











YOU
ALL RIGHT,
SON?

IT...IT
CHARGED RIGHT AT
US, SIR.
I DIDN'T
WANT TO PUT 'EM
DOWN, BUT...



YOU
DIDN'T HAVE A
CHOICE.

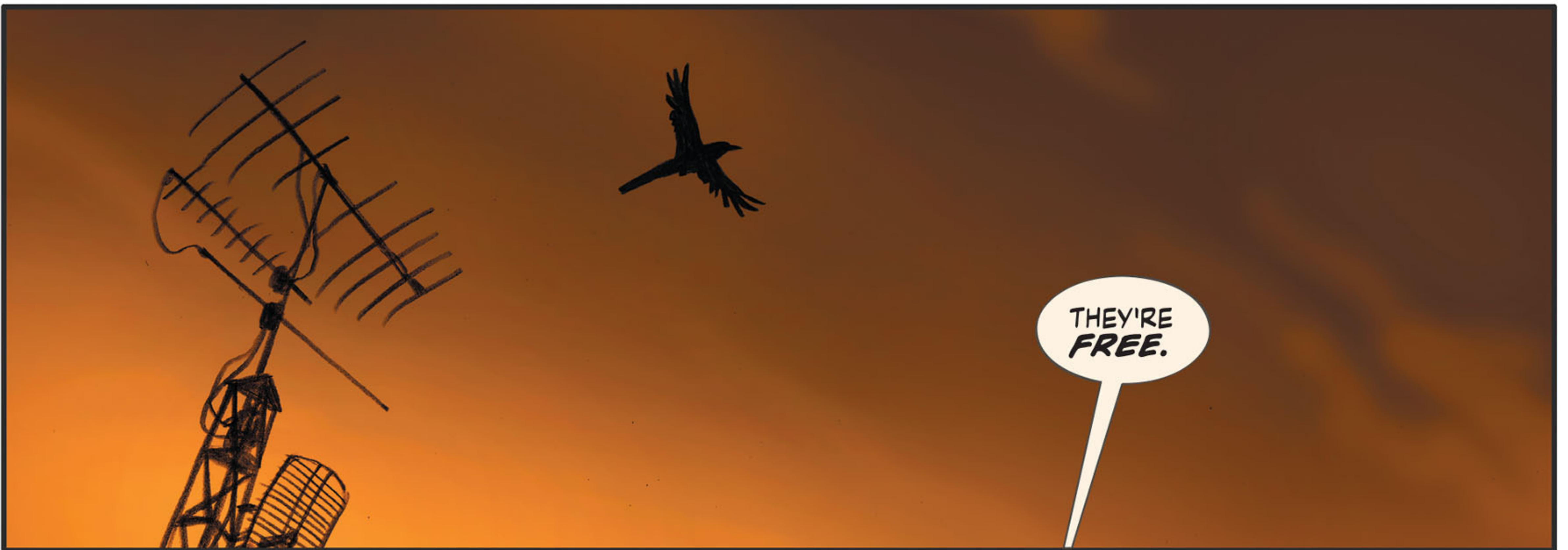
I KNOW.



WHERE'D
THEY COME FROM,
SIR?

THOSE
THINGS AREN'T
WILD OUT HERE,
ARE THEY?

NO, NOT
WILD.



THEY'RE
FREE.



In April of 2003, four lions escaped the
Baghdad Zoo during the bombing of Iraq.

The starving animals were eventually
shot and killed by U.S. soldiers.





There were other casualties as well.





BEFORE THE FALL

Preliminary text and artwork from Brian K. Vaughan and Niko Henrichon





PRIDE



A Brief Proposal for the
Original Graphic Novel
Prepared for Vertigo Comics
September 8, 2003
Brian K. Vaughan

*"To whom do lions cast their gentle looks?
Not to the beast that would usurp their den."*
— William Shakespeare, Henry VI

"It's often better to be in chains than to be free."
— Franz Kafka, The Trial

In April of 2003, a pride of starving lions escaped the Baghdad Zoo during the American bombing of Iraq... only to be shot and killed by U.S. soldiers.

Surprisingly, this dramatic true story was
hardly covered by the American media.

Then again, few Iraqi casualties were.



THE MISSION

From *Animal Farm* to *Maus*, fiction has had a rich history of exploiting readers' inherent sympathy for animals to tell human stories that would normally be too abstract, too vast or too unfathomably horrific for most of us to digest.

By writing a simple fable told from the perspective of a real-world pride of lions, I'd like to ask complex questions about America's most recent — and still ongoing — war with Iraq. What is the true meaning of liberation? Can it be given to a country, or only earned through self-determination? Is it really better to die a free man than to live as a slave?

Obviously, I don't have answers for all of these questions, but in this day and age, they're ones I think comics for mature readers should be asking.

That said, I'm honestly not interested in writing a preachy, anti-American polemic. At its core, this is a dramatic, moving story about a family trying to stay together as the world falls apart. Told subtly and honestly, difficult questions will inevitably raise themselves, and readers will hopefully be left with enough space to draw their own conclusions.

THE HEROES AND THEIR STORY

Our lions — two males and two females — won't be overly anthropomorphized; they'll just be the only characters whose dialogue we can "hear" (a bit like Neil Gaiman's "Dream of a Thousand Cats," I suppose). Iraqi civilians and American soldiers will be voiceless background players, as the lions concern themselves with food, freedom and taking care of each other.

HALIMA ("Young Dreamer") — Zill's current mate, Halima is a fiery young lioness. She barely remembers life in the wild, but she's certain that it was better than captivity. Halima represents the reform-minded younger

generation of Iraq, those who want true democracy in their country. For years, Halima has been trying to convince the other animals in the zoo that escape is possible, *if* they all work together. While the other creatures have long scoffed at her ideas, the coming invasion the birds promise could mean the realization of Halima's dream... or its death.

EL-AWRA ("The Blind One") — The oldest member of our group, El-Awra is Zill's former lover, a now-sightless lioness. Having been nearly killed by another lion while living in the wild, El-Awra can't understand why anyone would ever want to leave the zoo, where the only price for safety is a little *freedom*. Obviously, El-Awra represents those Iraqis who gladly pledged allegiance to Saddam in exchange for the relative stability he helped create. After the American bombing destroys her cell, El-Awra vows to stay in the zoo, but when Halima convinces the other lions to explore Baghdad with her, El-Awra reluctantly follows them, knowing that she won't last long on her own.

BUKRA ("Tomorrow") — The son of Zill and Halima, Bukra is the only lion of our pride born in captivity. The cub knows no life outside of the zoo. Bukra represents the innocent children of Iraq, those kids who had no opinion of Saddam, George W., or much of *anything* outside of their families and friends. There are conflicting reports about how many lions were really shot by American soldiers (some accounts say three, others four), so I thought it would be interesting if Bukra actually survives the shooting that kills the other three members of his pride, and escapes into the chaotic streets of Baghdad. Will the injured young cub be found and nursed back to health by the American soldiers who killed his family, or will Bukra grow up to be a fierce man-eater, hungry to avenge their deaths? We'll leave this question unanswered and, in the process, hopefully encourage readers to ask themselves if America has helped end terrorism by waging war against Iraq... or if we have simply created a whole *new* generation of terrorists.









THE ANTAGONISTS

THE ZOO — Rather than have innocent Iraqi zookeepers stand in for Saddam, we'll have the zoo itself represent the dictatorial Hussein regime. Much like pre-war Iraq was to its average citizens, the zoo is an irrefutable prison for the animals who call it home. They are denied countless freedoms their brethren in the wild enjoy, and while a handful of the zoo animals thrive, many suffer and die in captivity. Still, the zoo does provide a certain degree of comfort and security that some animals fear they would lose if they dared to leave their cages.

FAJER ("The Wicked One") — According to an article written during the most recent bombing in Baghdad, after American mortar rounds blasted open the bars of its cage, a black bear mauled and *partially ate* three civilians. Clearly, this animal works as a perfect metaphor for the Saddam loyalists and assorted terrorists who use violence in the hope of maintaining the status quo. Before they can escape the zoo, the four lions of our pride will have to band together to slay this terrifying beast.

THE SOLDIERS — Don't worry, I have no intention of portraying American troops as bloodthirsty marauders. When the soldiers shoot our lions, they will do so only because they believe their lives are in danger. Whether or not they used excessive force, or if they could have stopped the animals another way, will be open to debate.

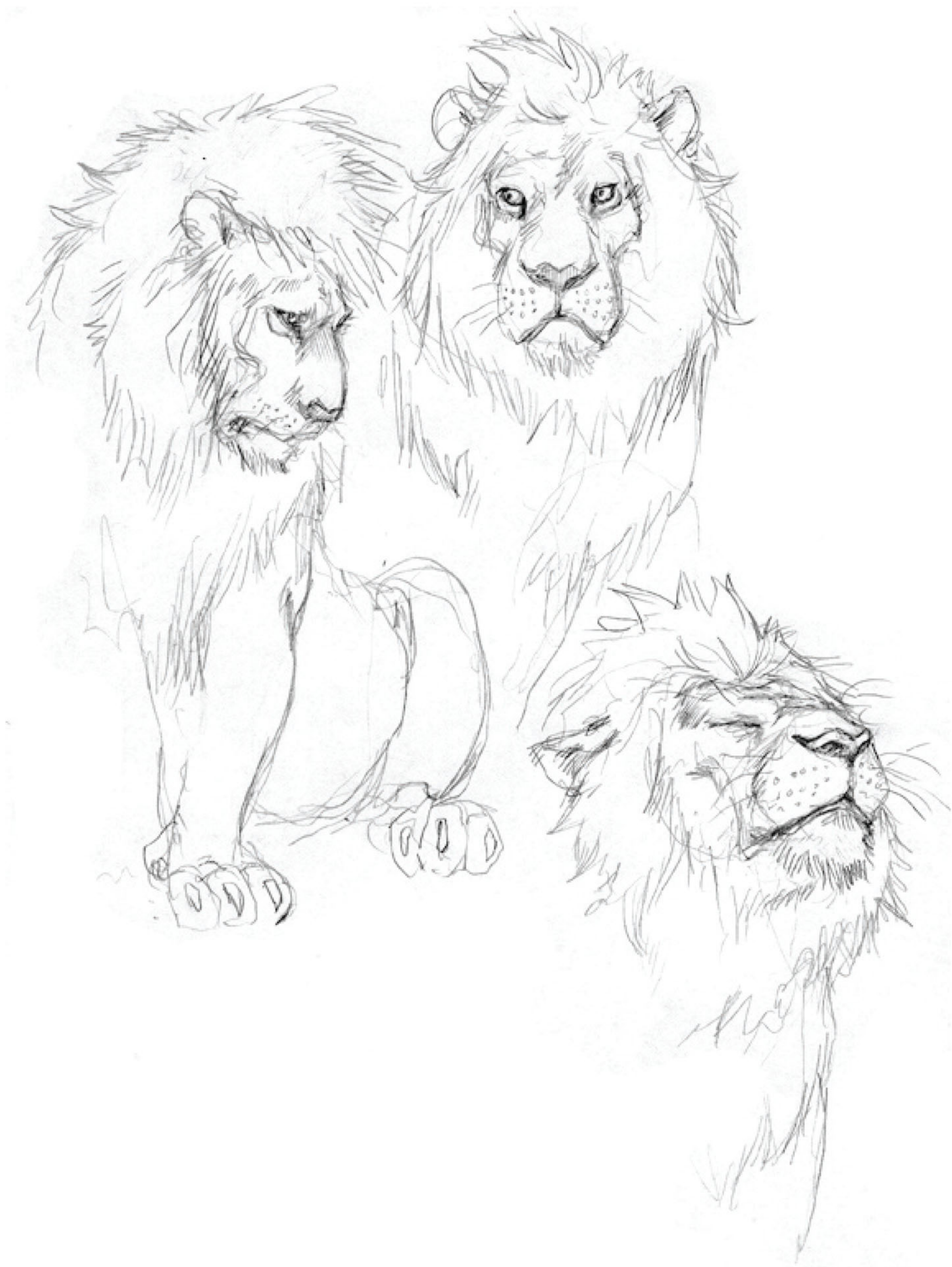
THE ARTIST AND THE FORMAT

I'd love to see a Terry Gilliam-esque image of four lions roaming the streets of Baghdad as bombs explode overhead. We need an artist who will be able to handle the duality of this parable: While on the surface, *Pride* may resemble one of those fascinating "true life" animal stories like *The Incredible Journey*, the subtext and subject matter will obviously be more mature (our lions will fight, kill, make love, etc.).

I really think the *only* format for a story like this is an original graphic novel, maybe a 128-page hardcover (possibly with larger dimensions, like a European album or a high-end children's book?). Either way, I personally guarantee that the book will sell as well in comics stores as Warren and Colleen's terrific *Orbiter*, and I'm confident that it will do even better business in *mainstream* bookstores. Like Y: *The Last Man*, *Pride* is the kind of topical, political, challenging-yet-accessible project that will inevitably generate a lot of buzz/debate/discourse.

Thanks very much for taking the time to read this brief pitch, and I look forward to hearing your thoughts!







PRIDE

THE LIONS OF BAGHDAD

An Extended Outline for the
Original Graphic Novel
Prepared for Vertigo Comics
May 27, 2004
Brian K. Vaughan

NEW STUFF

Will, Niko and Casey —

Hey, guys! This extended outline will be fast and rambling, but it should give you an indication of where we're headed for the next 128 pages or so of our lives. I've been thinking about this story for months now, and I flatter myself to think that it's going to be one of those books that we'll be remembered for. (Either that, or it'll be a *spectacular* failure!) Seriously, this is going to be great, and I'm really happy to be collaborating with all three of you.

(Speaking of collaborators, any chance we could afford Todd Klein for letters, Will? Todd's the only "voice" I can picture for talking animals.)

Also, what do you think about extending our title to *Pride: The Lions of Baghdad*? I only suggest that because I see on IMDb.com that there's an upcoming children's cartoon about lions called *Pride* (sigh), and a new ABC animated sitcom about white lions called *Father of the Pride* (double sigh). I love PRIDE as a title, but adding the subtitle of "Lions of Baghdad" would definitely set us apart, *and* help our book reach out to readers who might otherwise think that we were just a kids' book.

Anyway, something to think about..

CHARACTER SKETCHES

Niko, I changed some of these names from my original proposal (after an interview with an Arabic-speaker about Iraqi words and meanings). Either way, here are some notes about our four main lions, who are all *African* lions, as opposed to Asian lions, which apparently have smaller manes:

ZILL — The patriarch of our pride, Zill is an older lion who grew up in the wild. Though he misses the freedom of his past, he's grateful for the regular meals that come with life in the Baghdad Zoo. He should be big and beautiful, Niko, with a spectacular mane.

NOOR (formerly Halima) — Zill's current mate, Noor is a brilliant, fiery young lioness. She barely remembers life in the wild, but she's certain that it was better than captivity. She should be lean and dangerous, Niko.

SAFA (formerly El-Awra) — The oldest member of our group, Safa is Zill's former lover, a now-sightless lioness. Having been nearly killed by another lion while living in the wild, Safa can't understand why anyone would ever want to leave the zoo, where the only price for safety is a little freedom. Safa should be *clearly* distinguishable from Noor, Niko. She's older, but not at all toothless. Maybe her pupils are entirely white? I'd like to give her a distinguishing mark *unlike* the one the character of "Scar" had in Disney's *The Lion King*. Instead, maybe she could be missing most of one ear?

ALI (formerly Bukra) — An orphan cub, Ali is the only lion of our pride born in captivity, and thus knows no life outside of the zoo. I actually haven't decided if Ali will be a boy or a girl, Niko (news reports say that three of the four animals shot were females), but either way, this cub should be cute and scrappy.

FAJER — And finally, our black bear antagonist. According to an article written during the most recent bombing in Baghdad, after American mortar rounds blasted open the bars of its cage, a black bear mauled and *partially ate* three civilians. Clearly, this animal works as a perfect metaphor for the Saddam loyalists and assorted terrorists who use violence in the hope of maintaining the status quo. Niko, I want to avoid giving this story too much of a "Disney" look, but for Fajer, I would definitely encourage you to check out the black bear at the end of the Disney movie *The Fox and the Hound*, which scared the holy shit out of me as a kid.



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CHAPTERS AND SETTINGS

After doing a rough outline, I was pleased to see that our story breaks down pretty neatly into six “chapters” of roughly 20 pages apiece. Each chapter will have its own setting and unique color palette. (Which reminds me, are there any colorists you’re dying to work with, Niko? Never hurts to ask...)

Anyway, I’m going to try to keep myself to three- or four-panel pages, and I picture theses panels being primarily page-wide “letterbox” shots, to play to the shape of our lanky, horizontal characters. We’ll also throw in the occasional double-page spread at chapter openings, just to establish the overwhelming scope of Baghdad. Trust me, this is going to be *beautiful*.

For now, these are the very broad strokes of what I have planned, a skeletal outline that will at least help you start researching/sketching/thinking/ etc., Niko:

CHAPTER ONE (Pages 1-23): We open in the Baghdad Zoo (very naturalistic colors), as a flock of birds warns Zill that “the sky is falling.” Just then, a formation of American F-16 fighter jets SCREAM overhead, letting readers know that this is not your father’s parable.

We’ll spend most of this chapter establishing the status quo of life for the animals in the Baghdad Zoo, as well as introducing our cast and what they represent: Zill is the “benevolent opportunist” who secretly prays that this impending cataclysm will free him from his cell, although he pragmatically prepares for more of the same. Noor represents the reform-minded younger generation of Iraq, those who want to *earn* true democracy in their country. Safa represents those Iraqis who gladly pledged allegiance to Saddam in exchange for the relative safety and stability he helped create. And finally, Ali represents the innocent children of Iraq, those kids who had no opinion of Saddam, George W., or much of *anything* outside of their families and friends before the war.

Rather than have innocent Iraqi zookeepers stand in for Saddam, we’ll have the zoo itself represent the dictatorial Hussein regime. Much like pre-war Iraq was to its average citizens, the zoo is an irrefutable prison for the animals who call it home. They are denied countless freedoms their brethren in the wild enjoy, and while a handful of the zoo animals thrive, many suffer and die in captivity. Still, the zoo does provide a certain degree of comfort and security that some animals fear they would lose if they ever dared leave their cages.

As Noor tries to convince the other animals in the zoo that escape is possible (*if* they all work together), we’ll **flash back** to the plains of Kenya to see what life was like for Zill and Safa in the wild (allegorically, before Saddam came into power). While Safa graphically recounts how she was raped and nearly murdered by other lions, Zill vows Ali with his less-harrowing tales of freedom and the spectacular sunsets he witnessed.

This chapter ends with a bang, as the human zookeepers run for their lives when the bombs begin to fall.

CHAPTER TWO (Pages 24-40): This chapter will cover the lions’ **perilous escape from the zoo** (I’m picturing lots of red and black for this section, Niko). After the American bombing destroys her cage, Safa vows to stay in the zoo, but Noor convinces the other two lions to leave their “cells” and explore Baghdad with her.

During the ensuing chaos and confusion, Ali becomes separated from Zill and Noor. As shells explode and fire spreads, the young cub follows the voice of several **vervet monkeys**, mischievous looters who think that the young lion might make a good member of their thieves’ guild. They paw at Ali and hold him in place, even as the flamingos, pelicans and mountain goats flee the burning zoo. It’s complete bedlam.

Zill and Noor try to reach Ali, but they’re cut off from the monkeys’ corner of the zoo by a wall of flames. With seconds to spare, Safa finally reappears, *leaping* from the top of her cage into the monkeys’ realm. The elderly lion tears into the primates, swatting at them with her razor-sharp claws. Eventually, Safa rescues young Ali and reunites the cub with the rest of the pride.

As the bombs continue to fall, the heroic Safa reluctantly agrees to leave her beloved zoo with these three other lions.

CHAPTER THREE (Pages 40-61): We’ll slow things down a bit for this next section, as our pride crosses Baghdad’s infamous “Arches of Victory,” and takes up residence inside **Zawra Park**, the beautiful commons that surround the Baghdad Zoo (this area, renamed “The Green Zone” by Americans, is a surprisingly lush, verdant oasis in the middle of the desert, so this scene should be colored accordingly). This section of our story is what 1984 author George Orwell would describe as the “green world,” the portion of any dystopian work where the protagonists get to see an impossibly idealized version of their own horrible world.

To celebrate their newfound freedom, Zill and Noor mate loudly, while a jealous Safa skulks away with young Ali. The two soon encounter another of the zoo’s refugees, an **Iraqi fishing owl**.

This great bird tells the two cats about the *Lion of Babylon*, a famous statue in Iraq that shows a man about to be killed by a lion, though the man is resisting, shoving the beast’s mouth and paws away with his hands. Legend says that as long as this statue is standing, Babylon (and Iraq) will never be conquered.

Ali asks what the man and the animal in the statue represent, but the fishing owl (somewhat self-reflexively for our story) says that people must decide for themselves what this work of art means. Are they the lion or the human? Or are they both?

Just as Safa is about to ask if this statue survived the recent bombing, the ground begins to tremble. Safa scoops Ali into her mouth just as several **T-72 Soviet tanks** belonging to the Special Republican Guard (the only Iraqi forces allowed inside Baghdad before the war) come *rumbling* through the park, destroying everything in their path.

With their “green world” in ruins, Safa and Ali reconvene with Zill and Noor, and the four lions scurry into the streets of downtown Baghdad.









CHAPTER FOUR (Pages 62-80): This is our most “Terry Gilliam-esque” scene, with our ragtag pride roaming **the streets of Baghdad** as bombs explode overhead. Because this entire chapter will take place during that infamous April sandstorm, the dominant color of this section of the book will be that unforgettable *orange* that you saw when sand-swept embedded reporters checked in from the field.

Distraught that her plan to leave the zoo seems to *have* misfired, Noor wanders away from the rest of the pride, who stroll through abandoned marketplaces in search of food. In a horrific scene, Zill stumbles upon the fresh corpse of a recently killed Iraqi (although it’s unclear if this young male was a soldier or an innocent civilian). The starving animals debate whether or not to eat the flesh of this dead man, and just as Zill is about to tear into the rotting meat, Noor roars in the distance. She’s spotted something through the ginger fog of the sandstorm.

The other lions soon join Noor and see what’s caught her eye: a pack of purebred **Arabian horses** galloping through the bombed-out avenues! These horses (which the Hussein family abandoned when Saddam went into hiding) are lost and scared... perfect prey.

A wild chase ensues, as the lions hunt these horses through what remains of some of Baghdad’s most beautiful

landmarks. Eventually, the pride follows the faster animals to their home, and what the lions find inside fills them with shock and awe.

CHAPTER FIVE (Pages 81-109): Our penultimate chapter takes place inside the **opulent palace of Uday Hussein** (this section should be colored in cool blues and rich golds). Following the horses to the rear gardens of this palatial stronghold (decorated with countless winged lions and passages from the Koran), the pride is stunned to find *another* lion, one of Uday’s personal pets.

Trapped in its cage, this declawed, defanged lion is still wearing its leash (reminiscent of war crimes inflicted on Iraqis by both Saddam *and* Americans). Covered in black flies, it’s not clear if this captive animal is even dead or alive.

Feeling sad but vindicated, Noor tells the others that this is the fate that would have befallen them had *they* remained at the zoo. She says that all zoos are inherently evil, and as long as one of their brothers is in captivity, so are they all. Tired of Noor’s self-righteous rants (but too horrified to eat the horses they followed here), the pride struggles to free this imprisoned lion from its cage.







Just then, the pride hears a blood-curdling growl. They turn to see **Fajer**, a giant black bear who once belonged to Uday. Well-fed and much loved by his old master, Fajer is desperate to maintain as much of the “old regime” as possible. After chastising the pride for their ignorance about the way the ordered world really works, the bear decides to kill and eat these four smaller, weaker animals. Fajer attacks our quartet in what promises to be one of the most spectacular fights in the history of our medium (I mean it!).

Immediately swatting Zill into a marble column, Fajer knocks this past-his-prime male lion unconscious. The bear then turns his attention to the two lionesses. Noor and Safa valiantly fight to protect Ali, but Fajer is simply too powerful.

Just as the bear is about to crush the female lions’ skulls with his massive paws (as black bears frequently did back in the days of bear-bating), Zill springs to life, leaping onto the beast’s back before ultimately ripping open its jugular.

The lionesses lick Zill in appreciation, but there’s little time for celebration, as a barking pack of Uday’s **rabid dogs** soon appears. Too exhausted for another battle, the pride reluctantly leaves the captive lion behind, as they retreat back to the cruel world outside.

CHAPTER SIX (Pages 110-128): It’s out of the frying pan and into the fire for our final chapter, which should have our most naturalistic color scheme since Chapter One. The sandstorm has died down, but gun-battles rage on, as the pride **returns to the streets of Baghdad** one last time.

Frightened and starving, the three adult lions begin arguing about what to do next. Still upset that she ever left the zoo, Safa wishes that she could have died in her home, instead of on the streets. Noor counters that it’s better to die *free* than like the captive lion they left behind. Safa calls Noor a naïve idealist, and Noor retorts that Safa is a coward. The two then begin fighting with *each other*, paralleling the civil strife that inevitably plagues invaded countries.

Zill tries in vain to break up these two hellcats, but they’re deadlocked. Finally, the feud is interrupted when Zill realizes that Ali has gone missing. The lionesses stop fighting, as Noor spots Ali on the **rooftop** of a nearby tall building (maybe the bombed-out Al-Rashid Hotel?).

How did the cub get there? Did he grow wings, like the cats pictured in Uday’s palace? The three remaining lions work together to track Ali’s scent up several treacherous flights of bombed-out stairs.



When they finally reach the roof, the lions are overwhelmed by what they see Ali staring at... it's a glorious sunset, much like the ones Zill used to watch in the wilds of Kenya. The pride was unable to see sunsets from their cages back at the zoo, so this is the first real sunset some of them have seen in years (on in Ali's case, *ever*). The four lions huddle close to each other, as they watch in stunned silence.

Zill turns to smile at Safa, just as a shot rings out. A small spot of red suddenly materializes between Zill's eyes, as the proud male lion *drops dead*. Horrified, Noor instinctually charges at the off-panel source of the gunshots, only to be cut down in a hail of bullets. Safa tearfully tries to shield Ali, but the two of them are soon killed as well.

With her dying breath, Noor tries to whisper something to Zill, but her words gradually give way to the grunts and growls we'd normally expect to hear from lions. As we lose our window into the animals' world, we gain access to another, as we finally hear the first *human* voices of our story. An off-panel figure says, "Oh... oh, fuck."

We cut over to our big reveal: a nineteen-year-old American soldier with the U.S. 3rd Infantry. This genuinely dismayed young man is holding his still-smoking machine gun. He says, "Are... are those fucking *lions*? Jesus, one *charged* at me. What... what the fuck was I supposed to *do*?"

The soldier's superior puts a hand on the boy's shoulder and says, "It's all right. You did what you had to, kid."

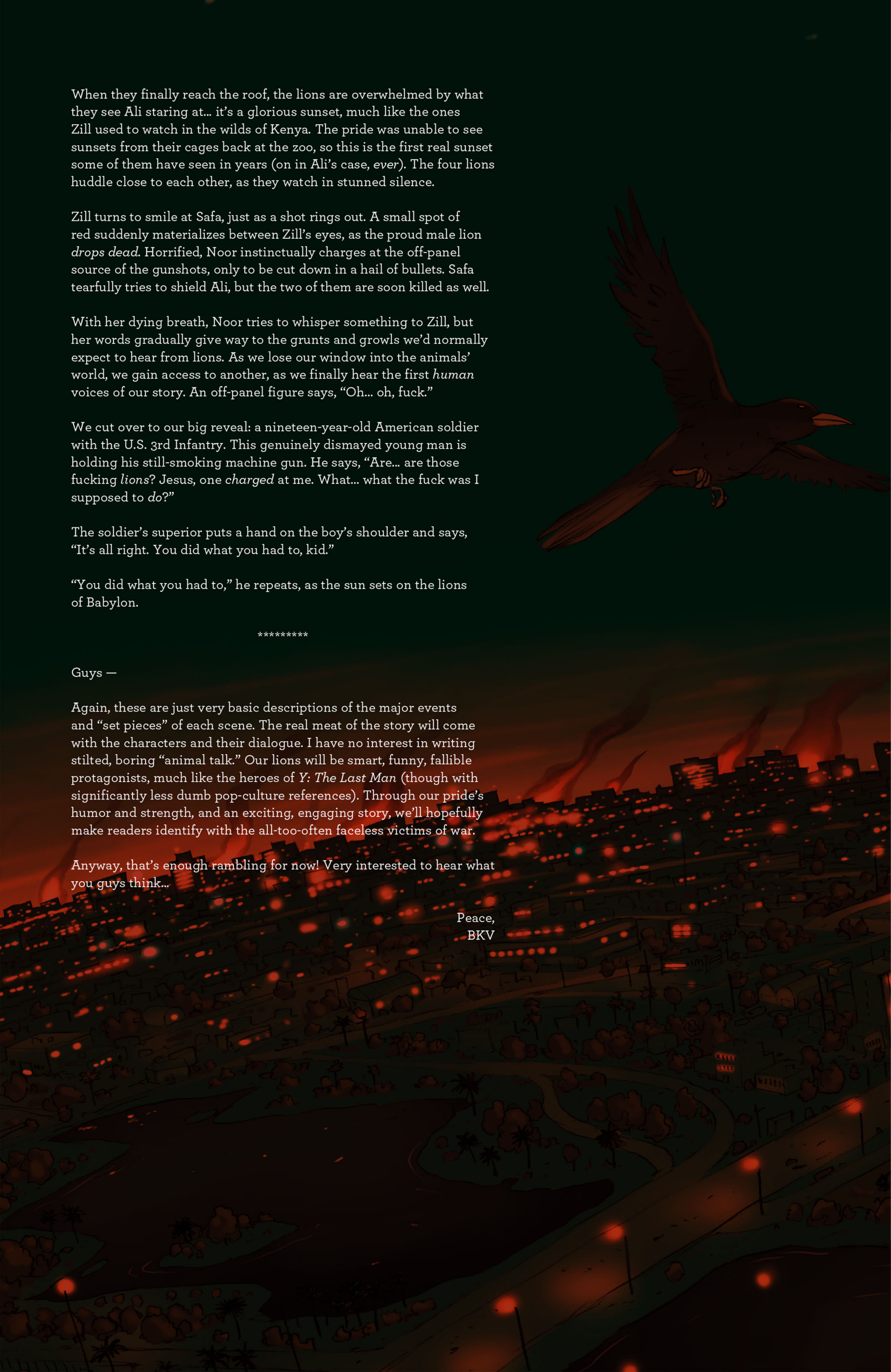
"You did what you had to," he repeats, as the sun sets on the lions of Babylon.

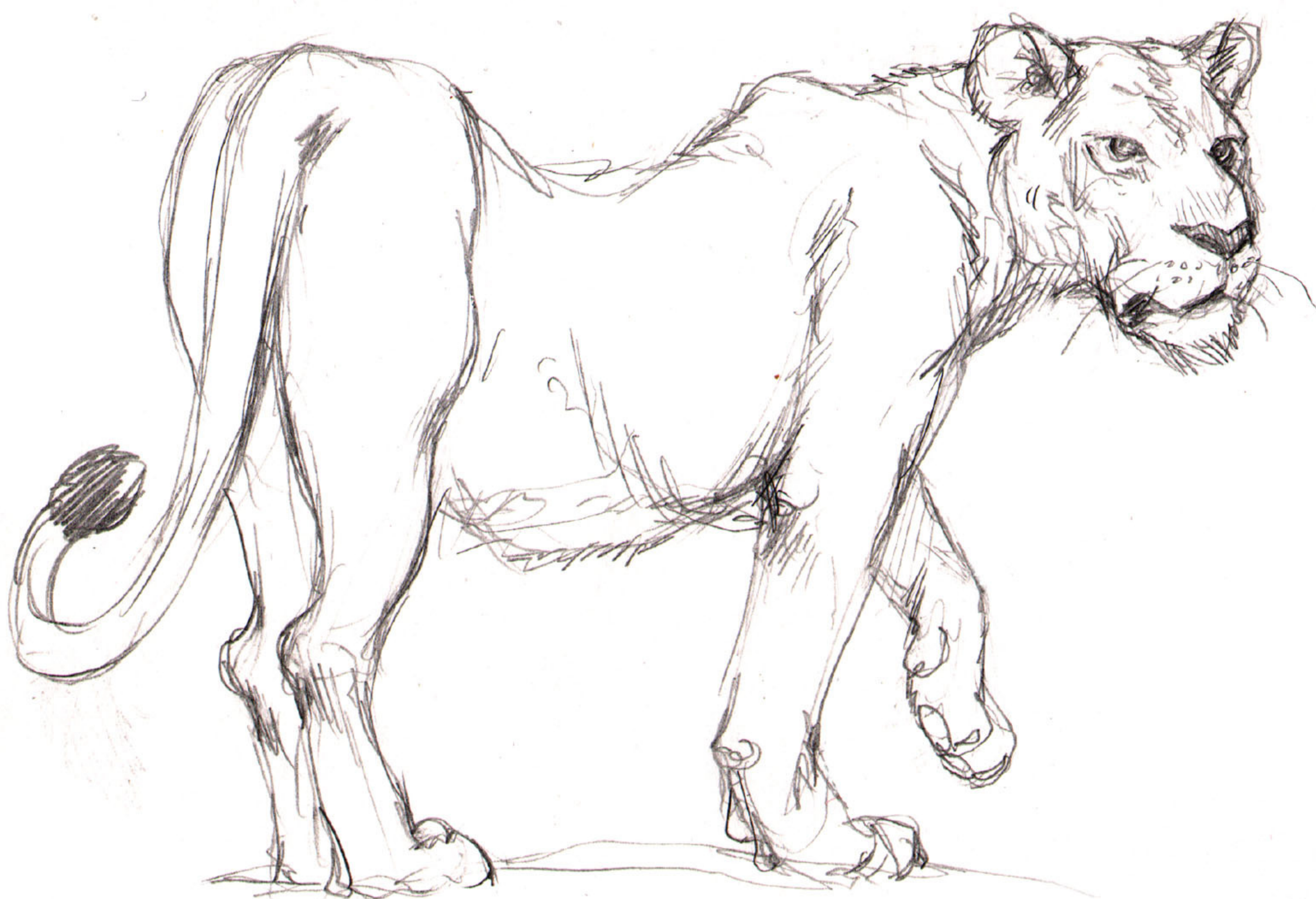
Guys —

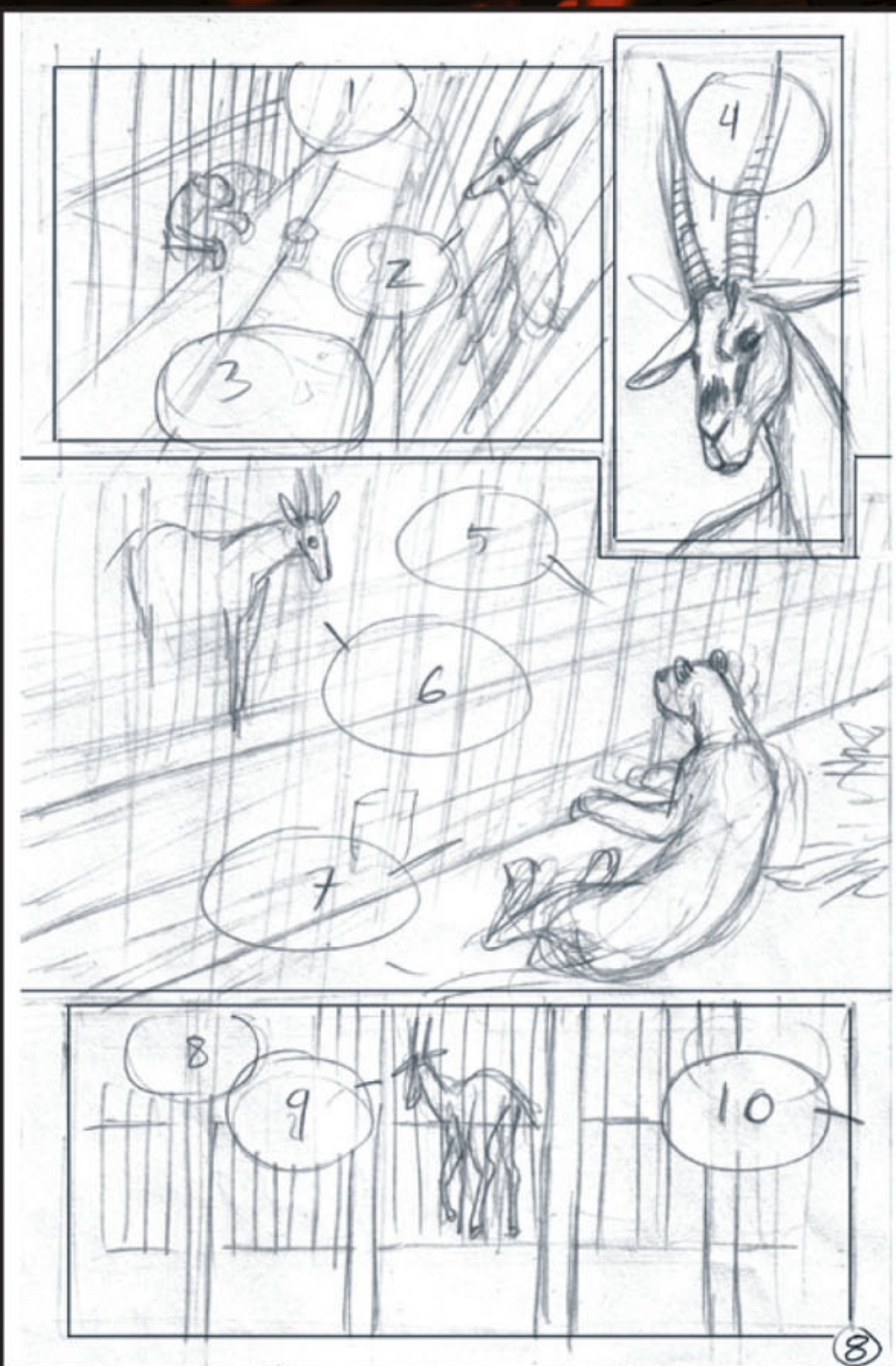
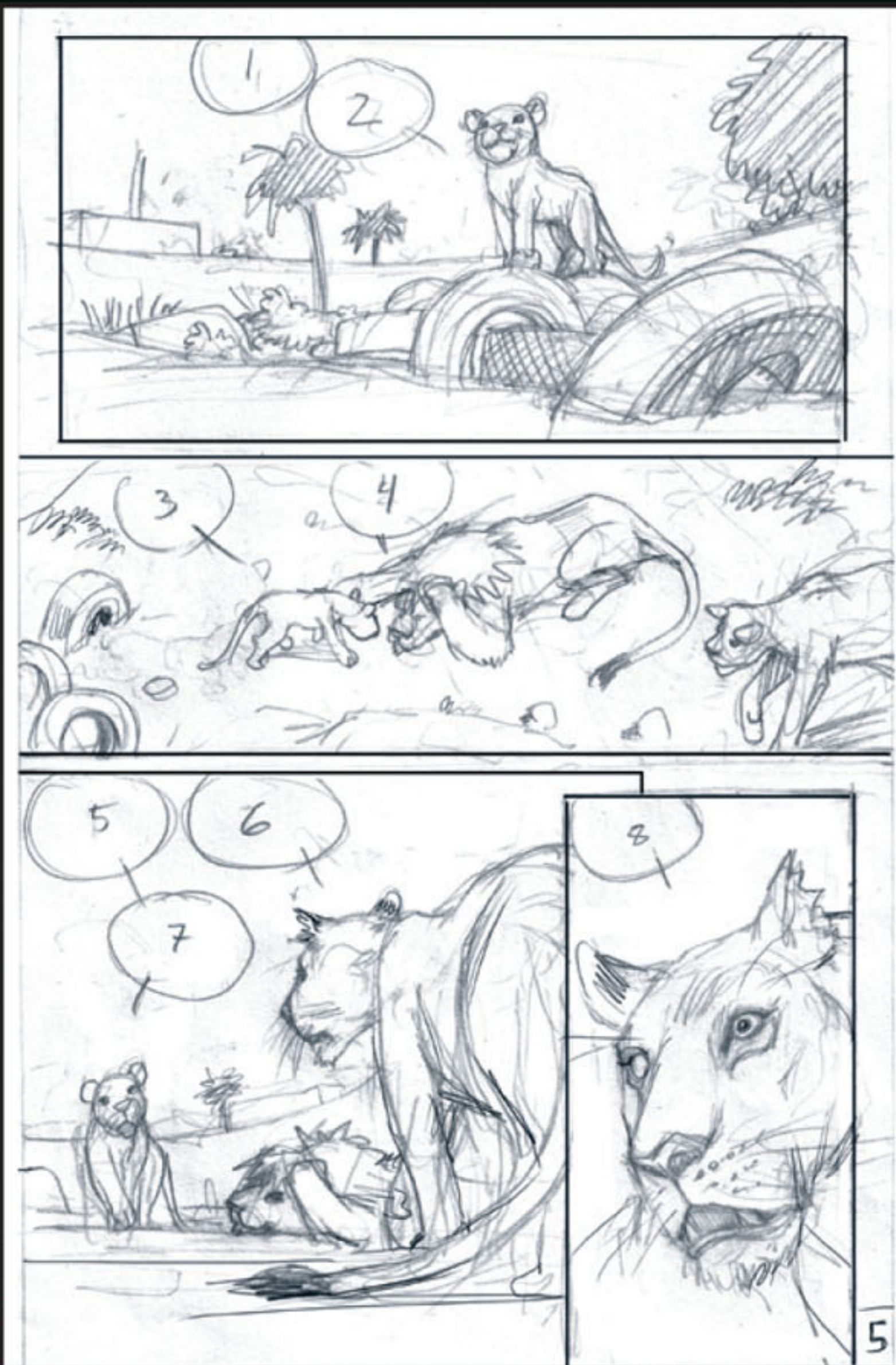
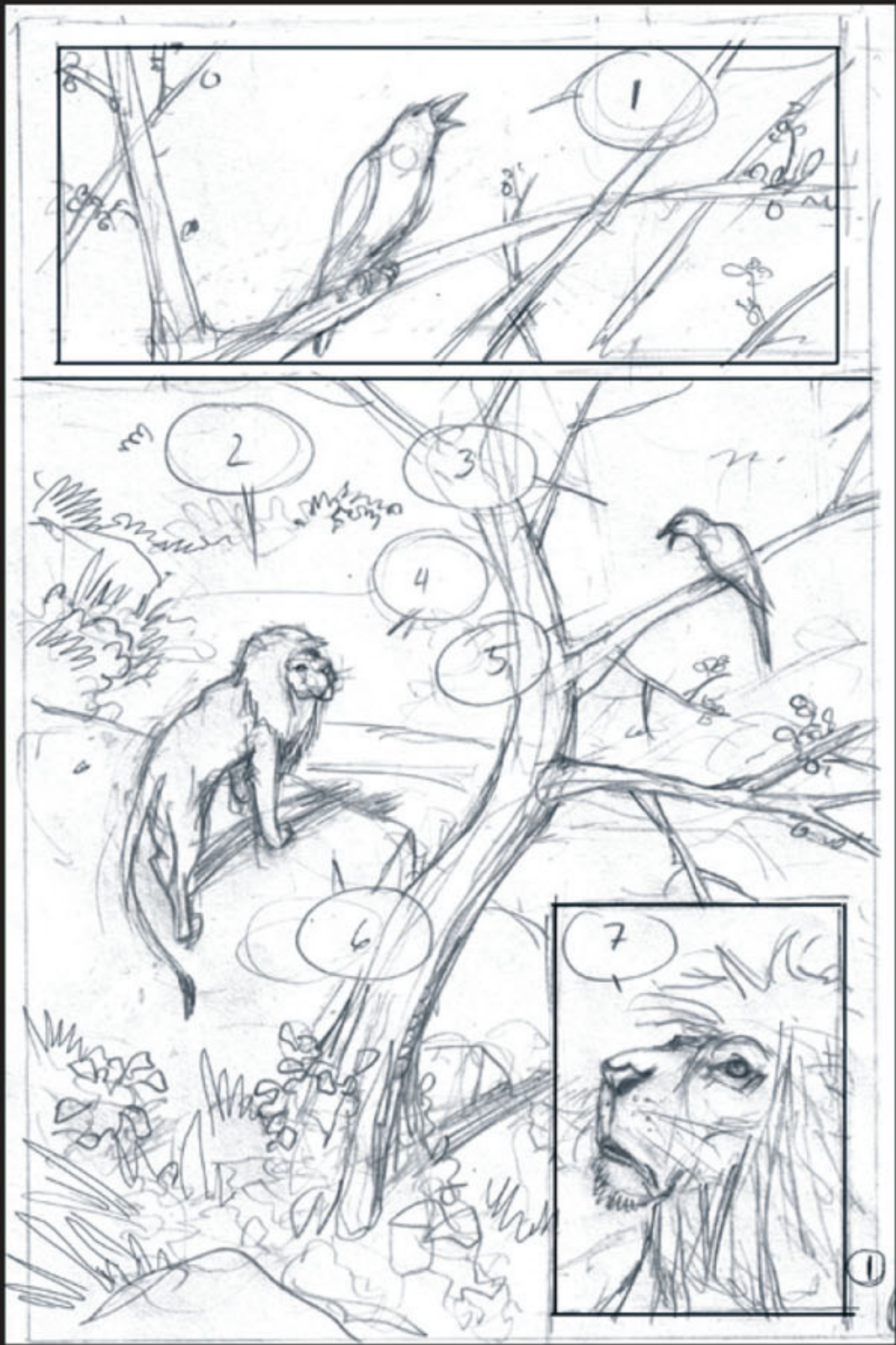
Again, these are just very basic descriptions of the major events and "set pieces" of each scene. The real meat of the story will come with the characters and their dialogue. I have no interest in writing stilted, boring "animal talk." Our lions will be smart, funny, fallible protagonists, much like the heroes of *Y: The Last Man* (though with significantly less dumb pop-culture references). Through our pride's humor and strength, and an exciting, engaging story, we'll hopefully make readers identify with the all-too-often faceless victims of war.

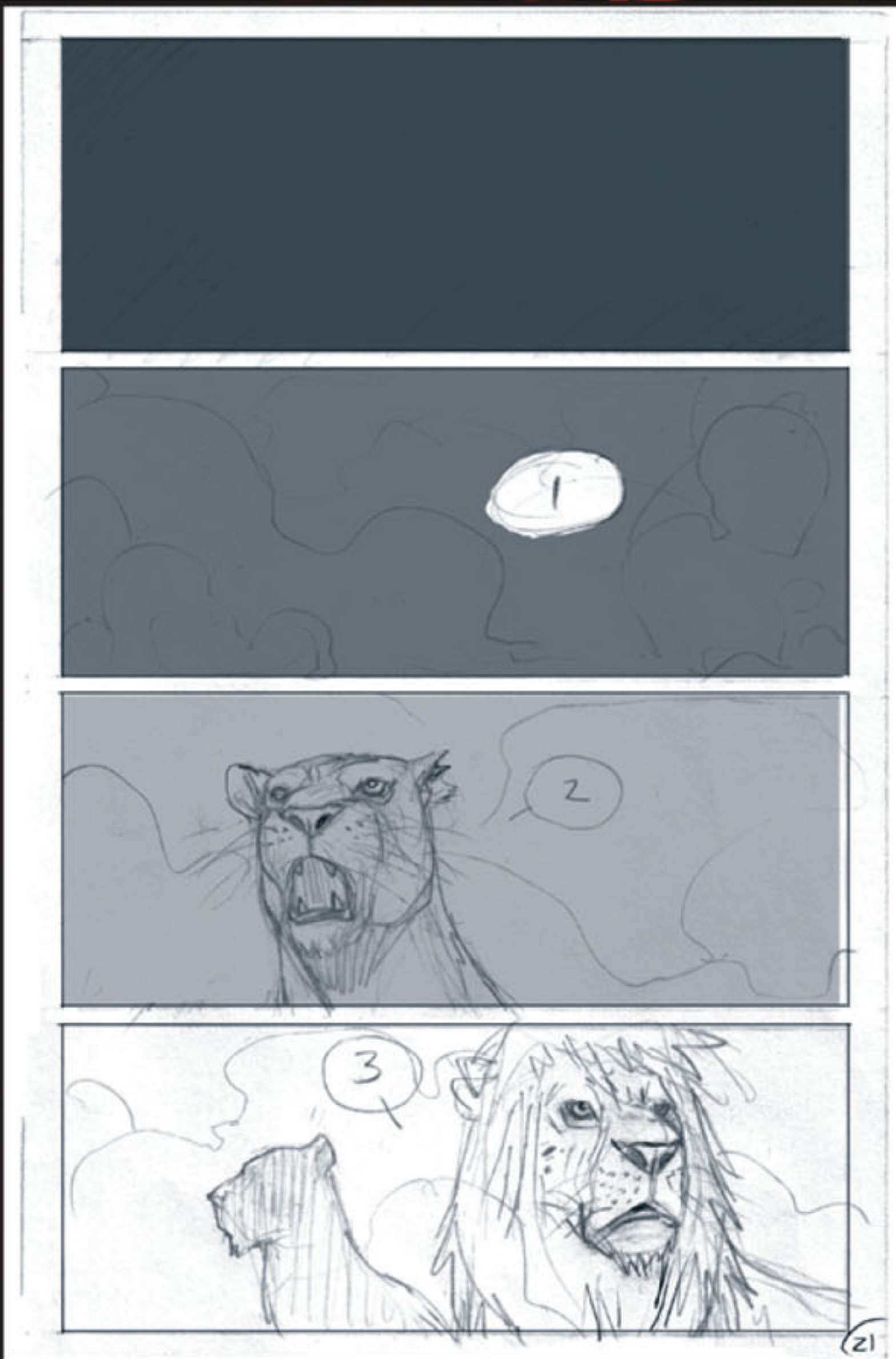
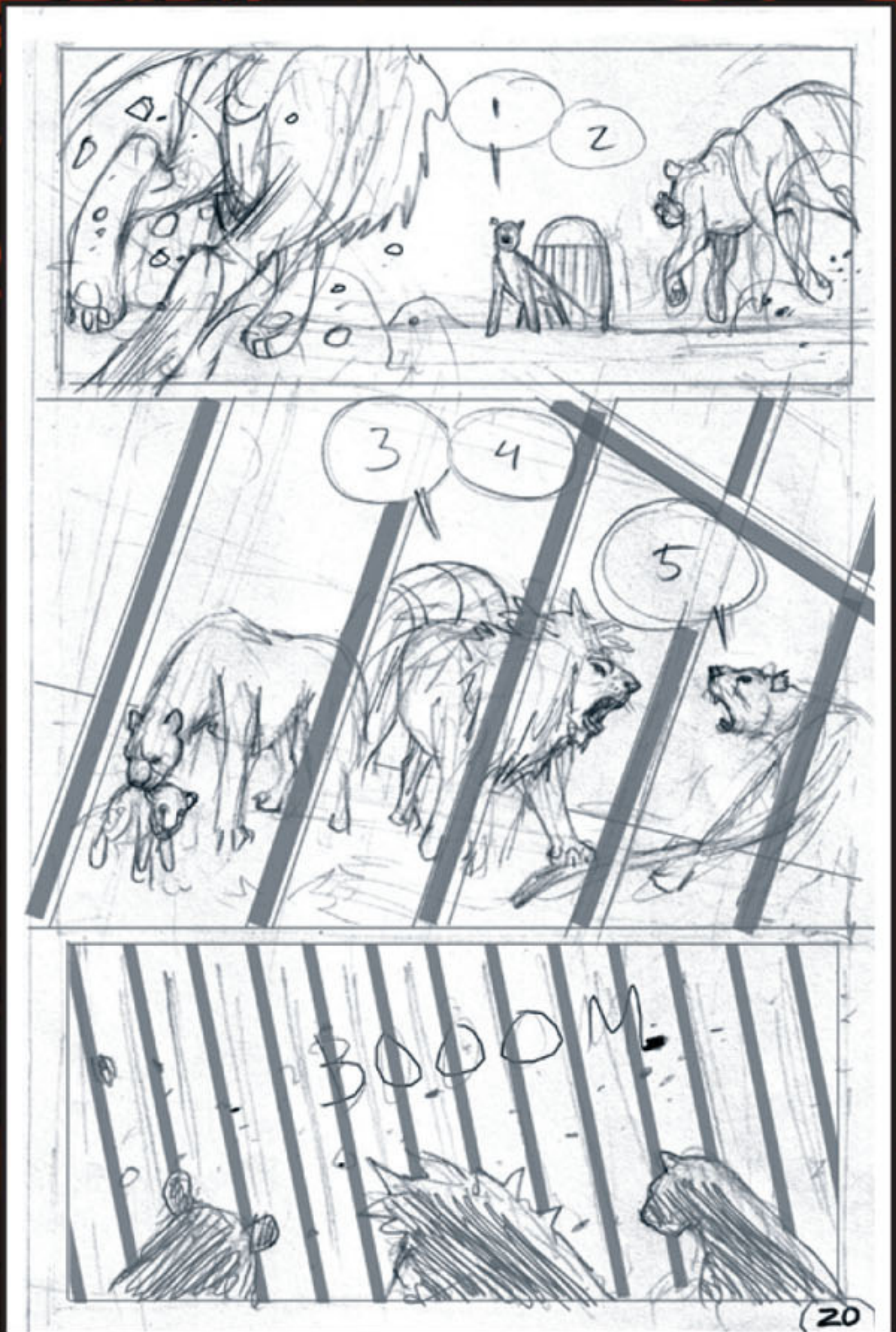
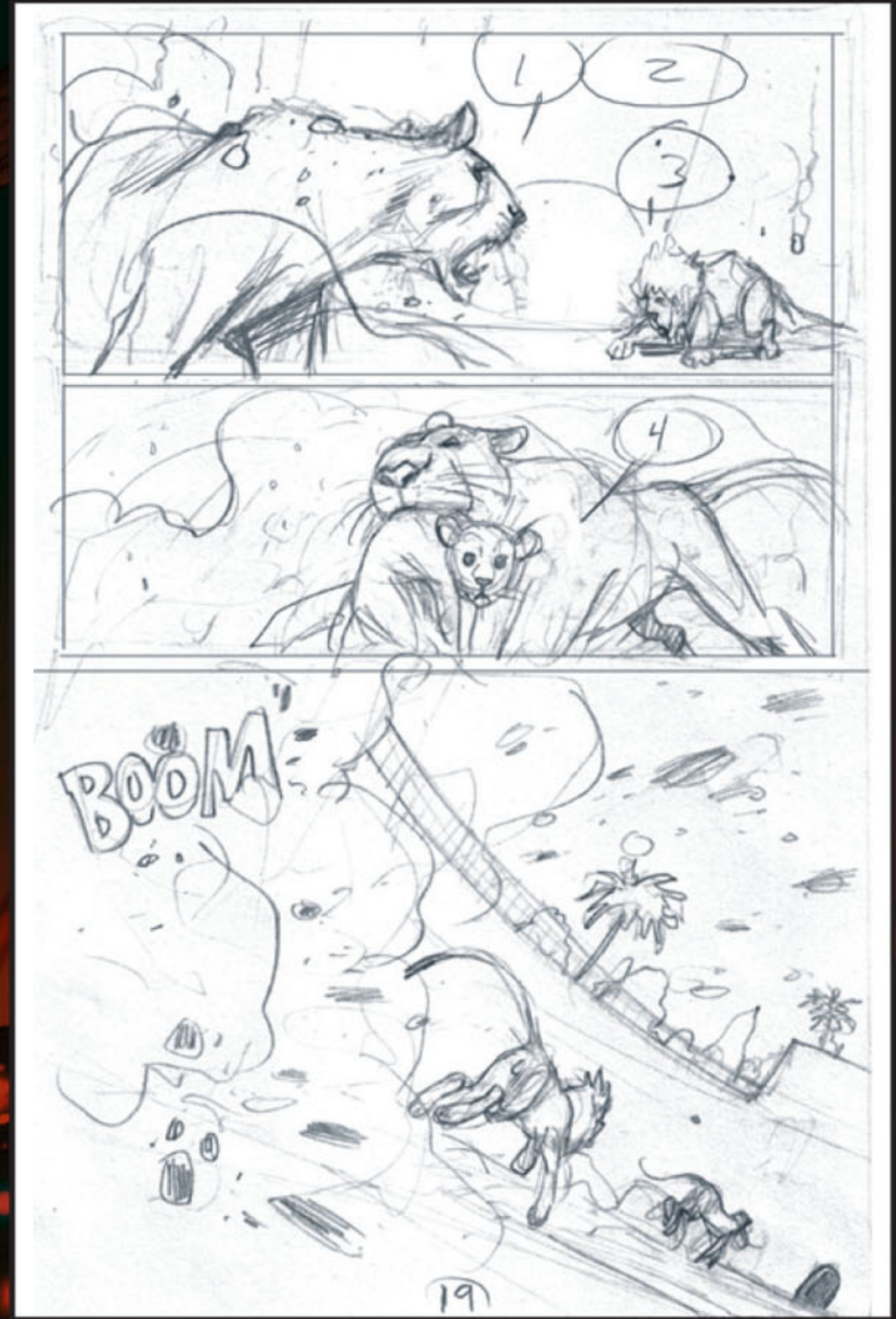
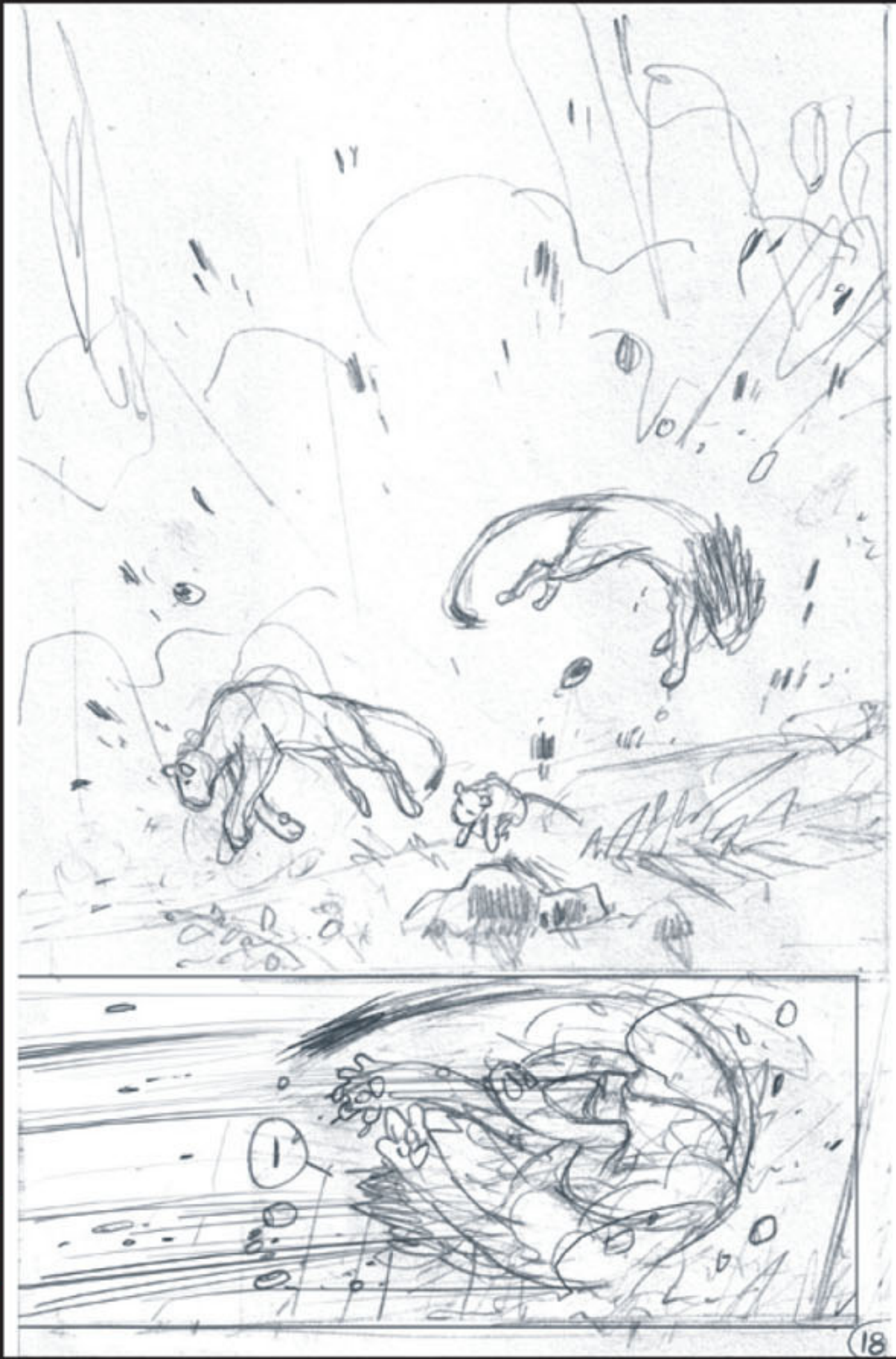
Anyway, that's enough rambling for now! Very interested to hear what you guys think...

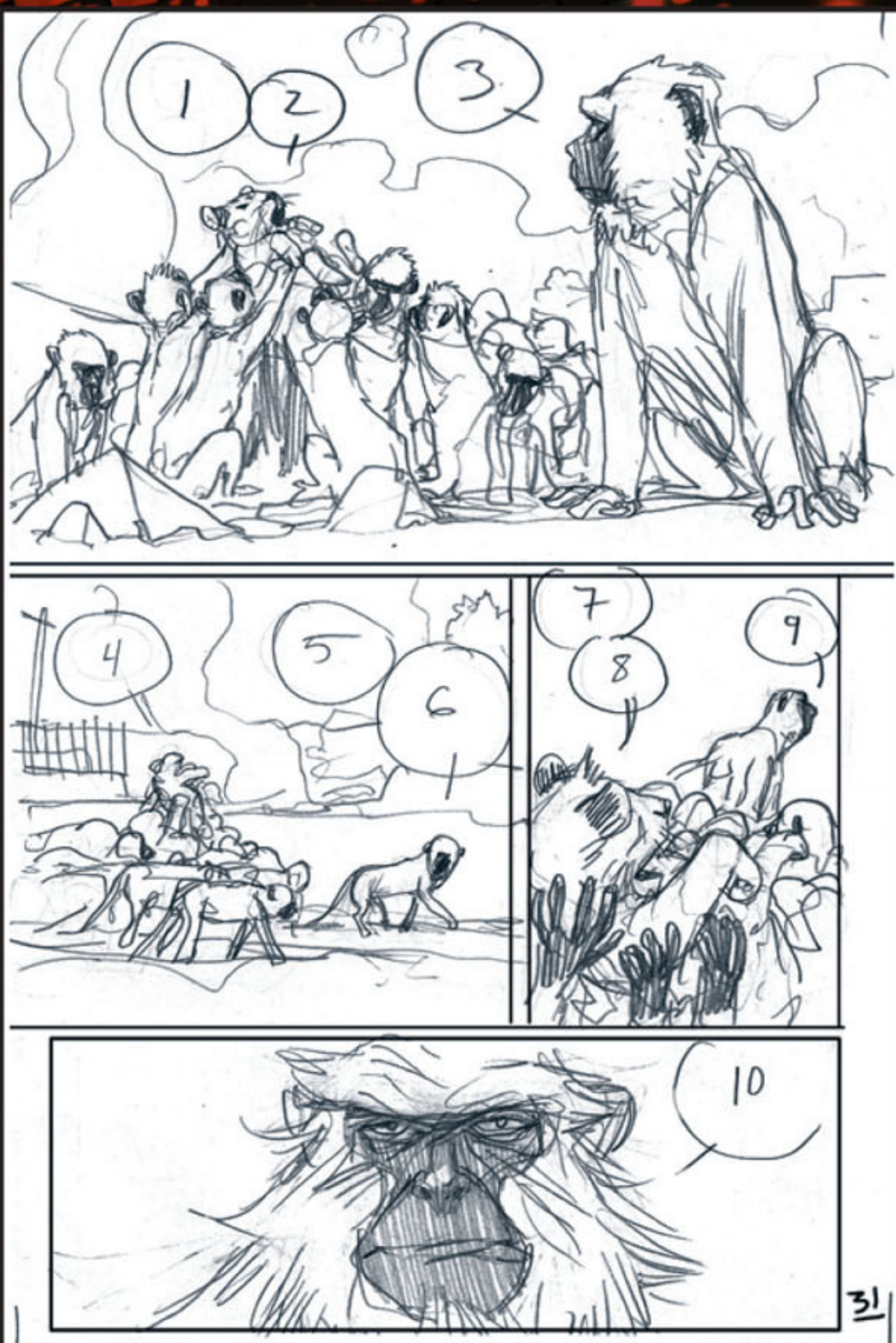
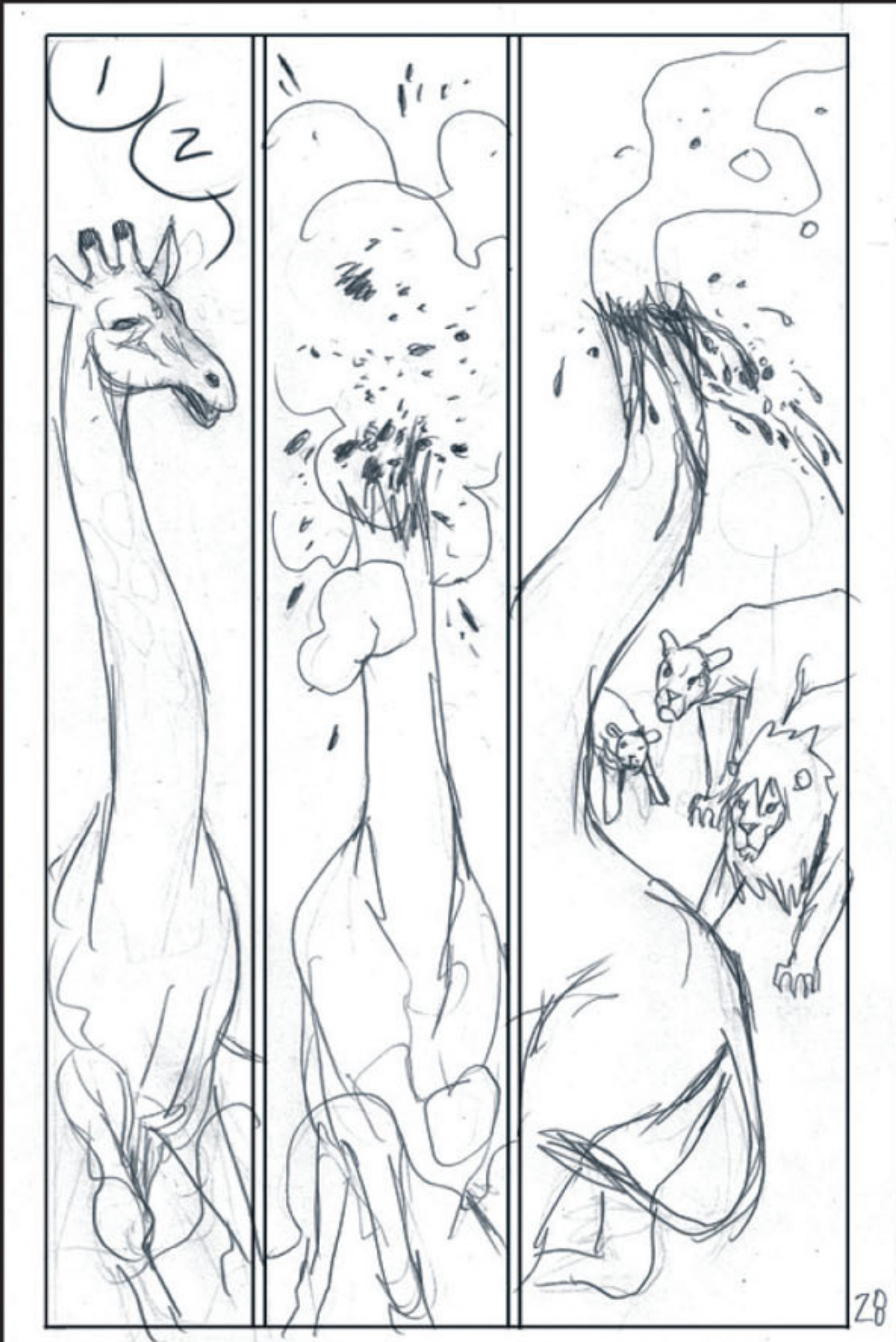
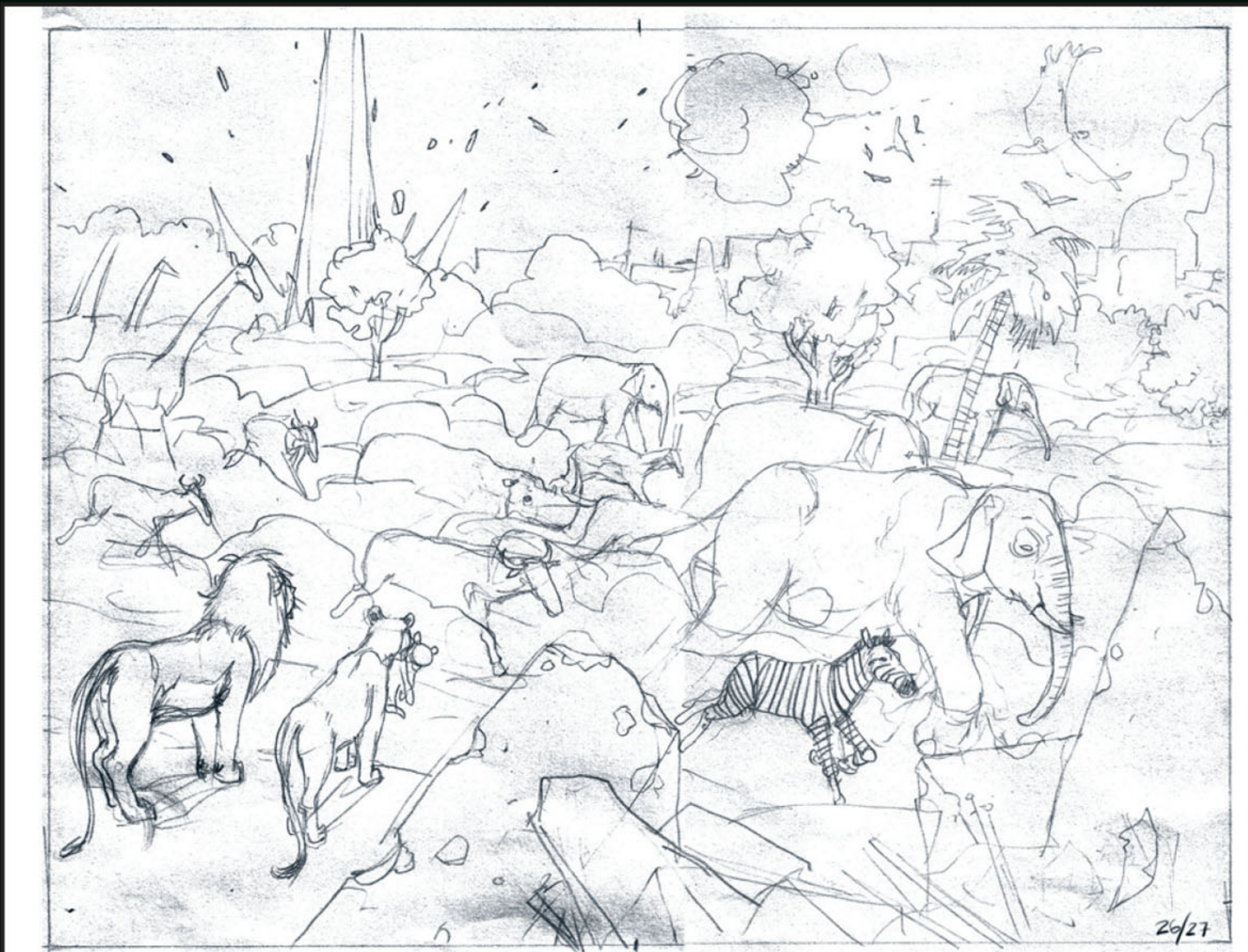
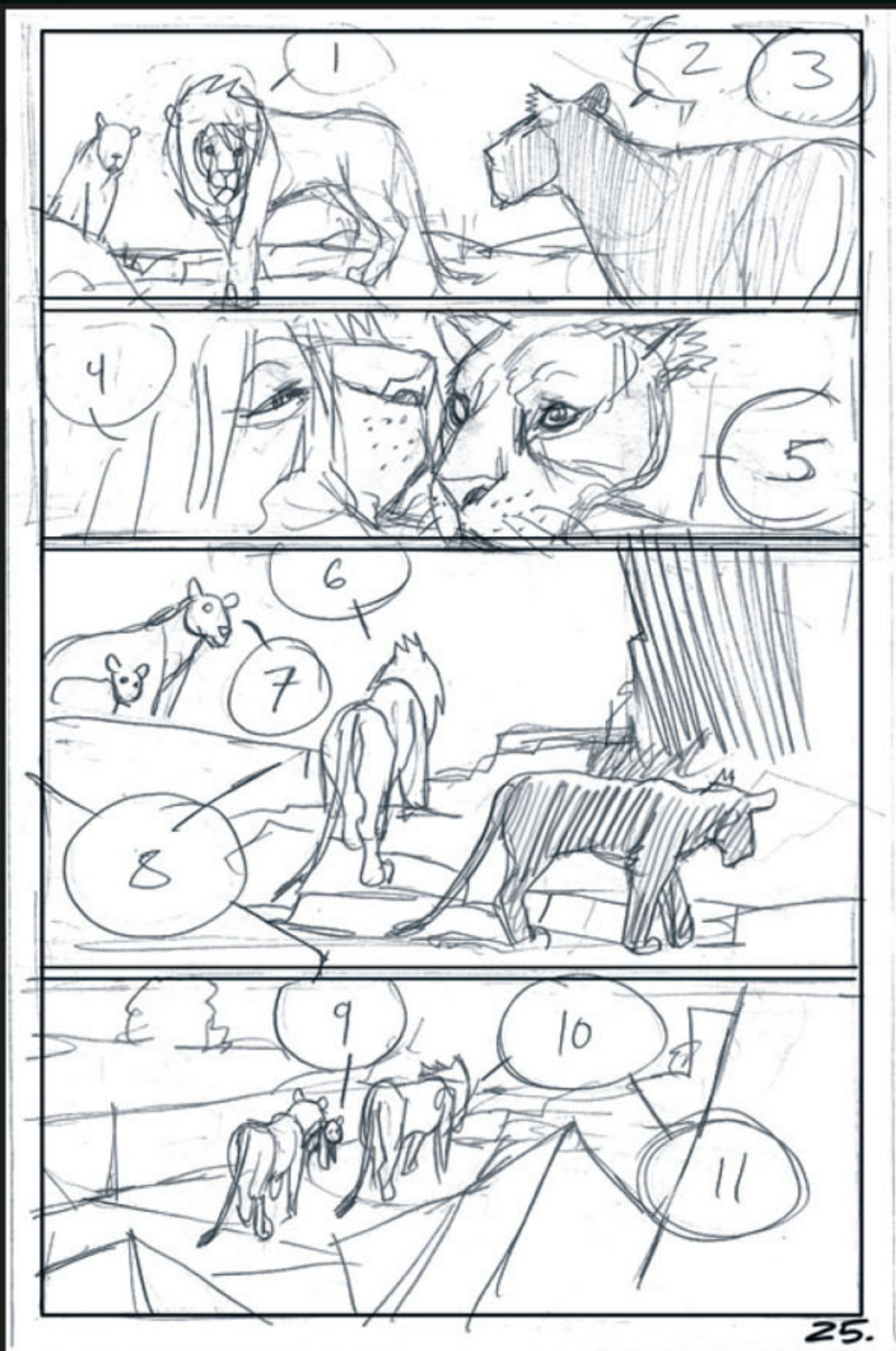
Peace,
BKV

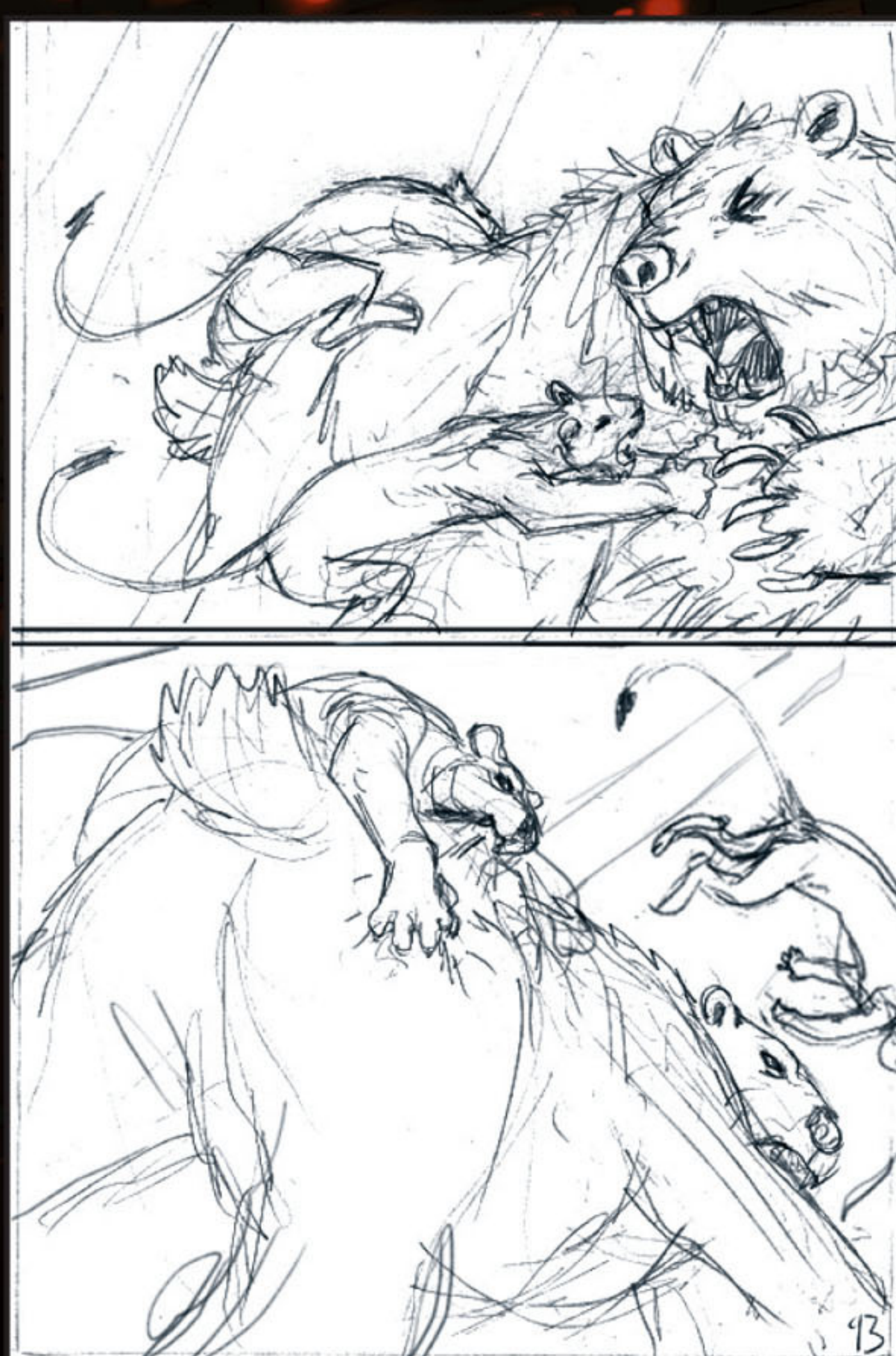


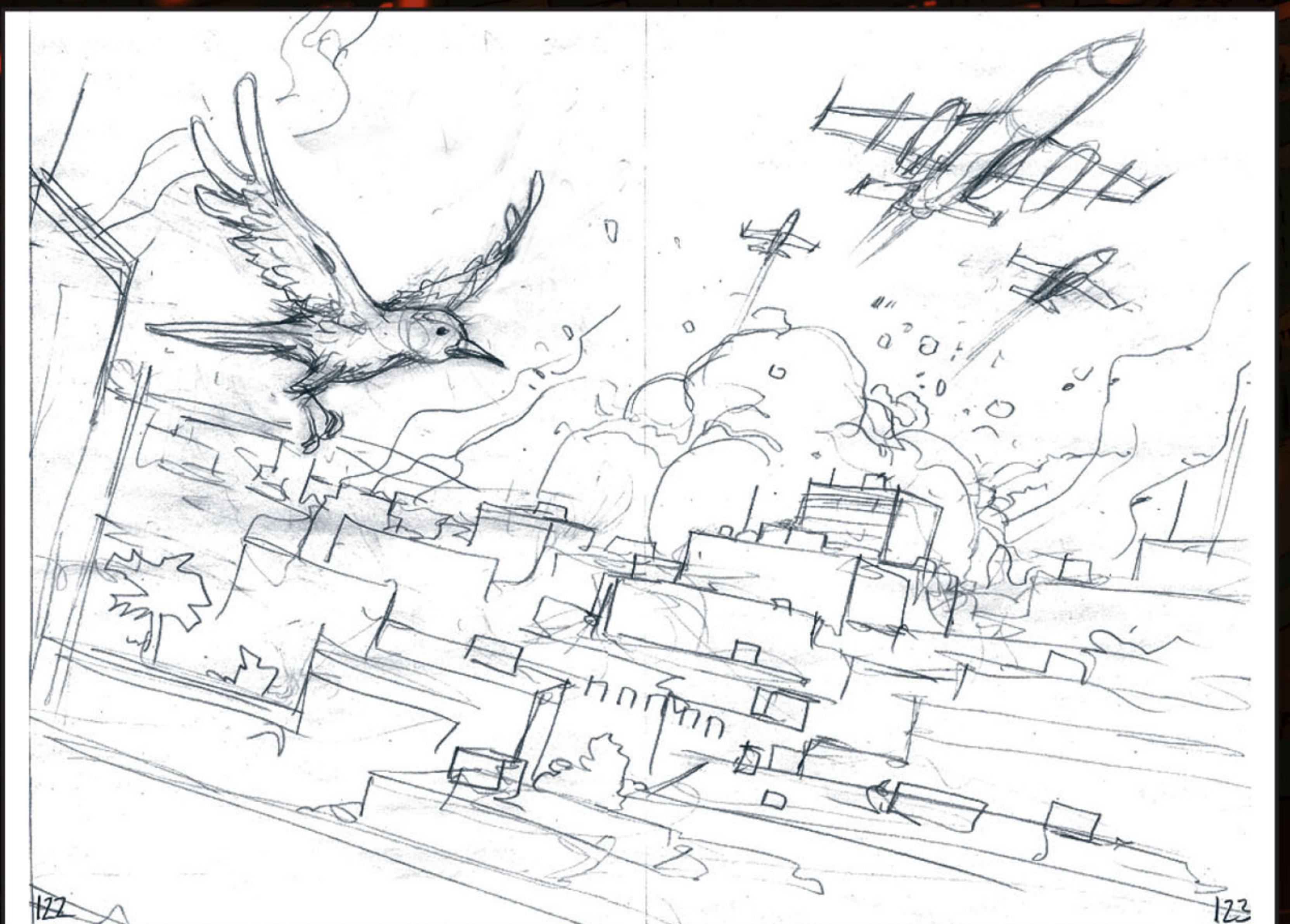
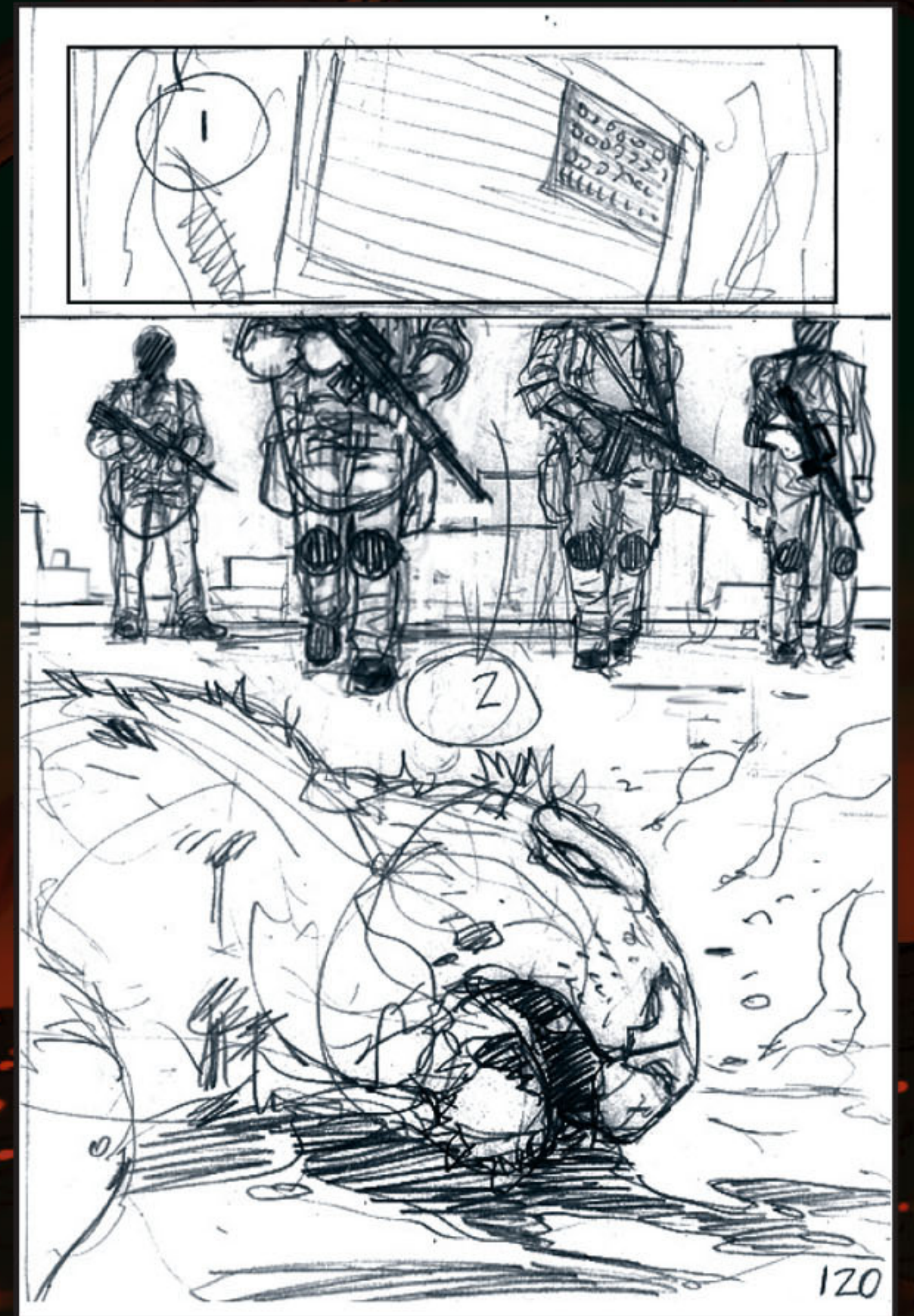
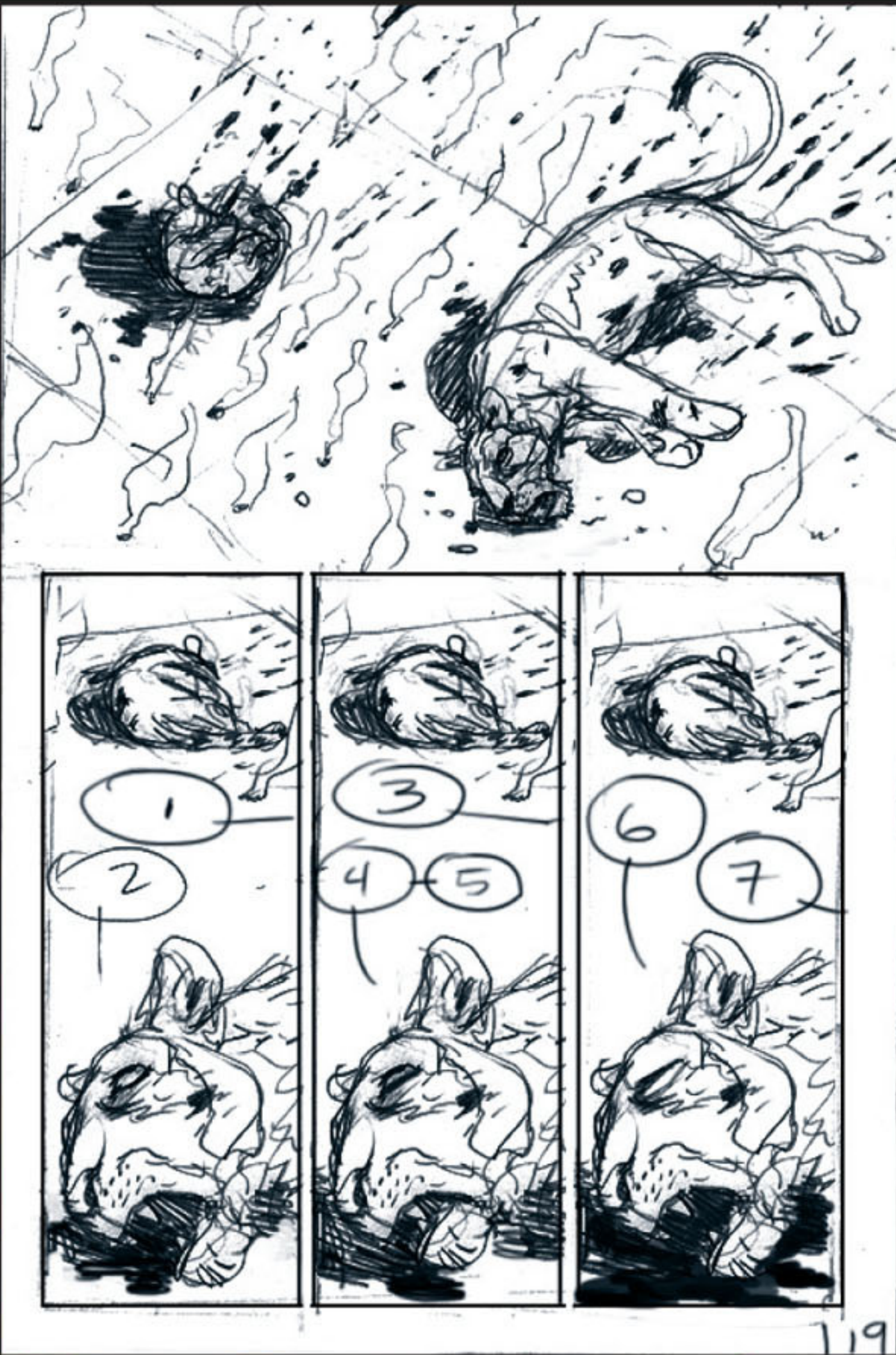
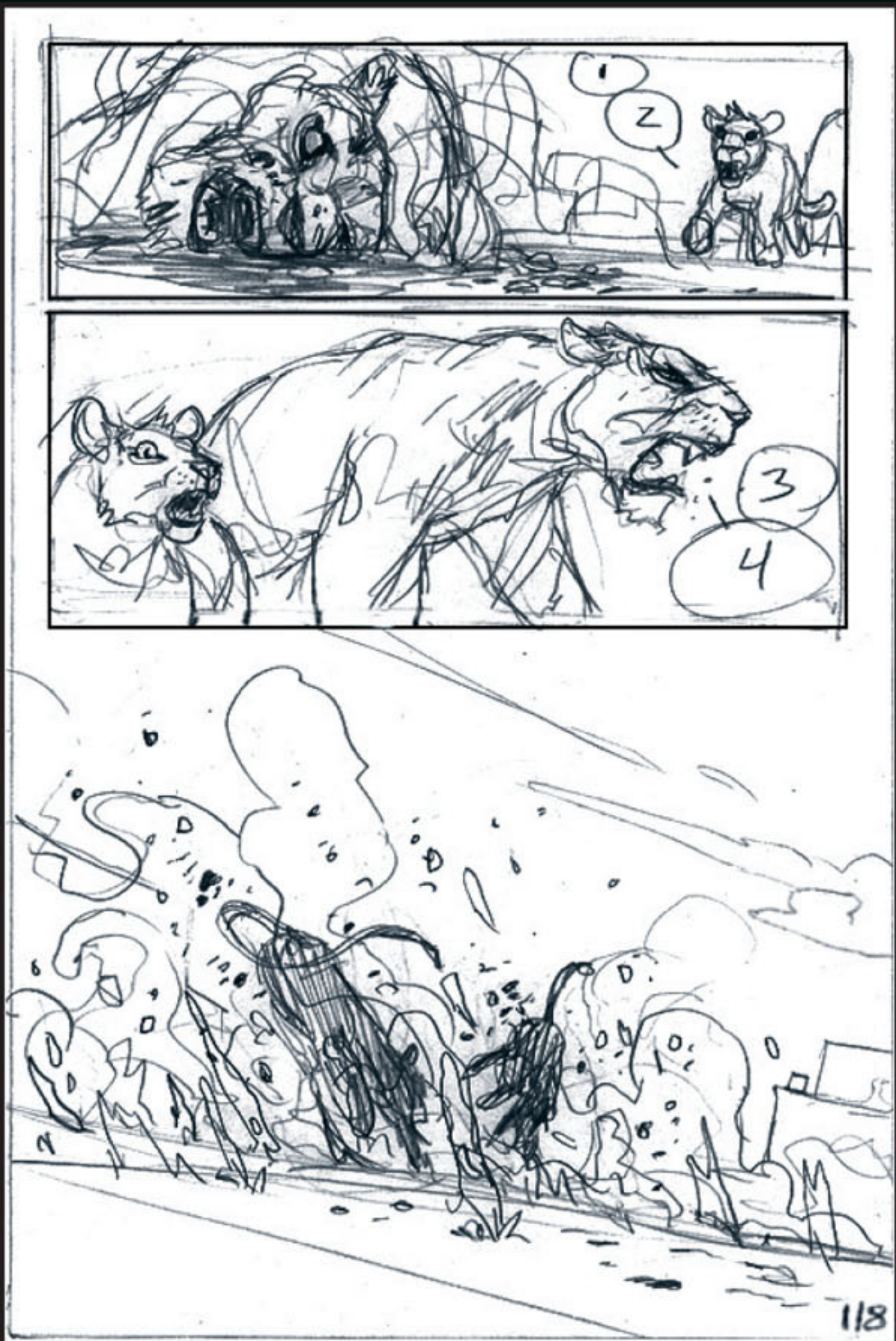
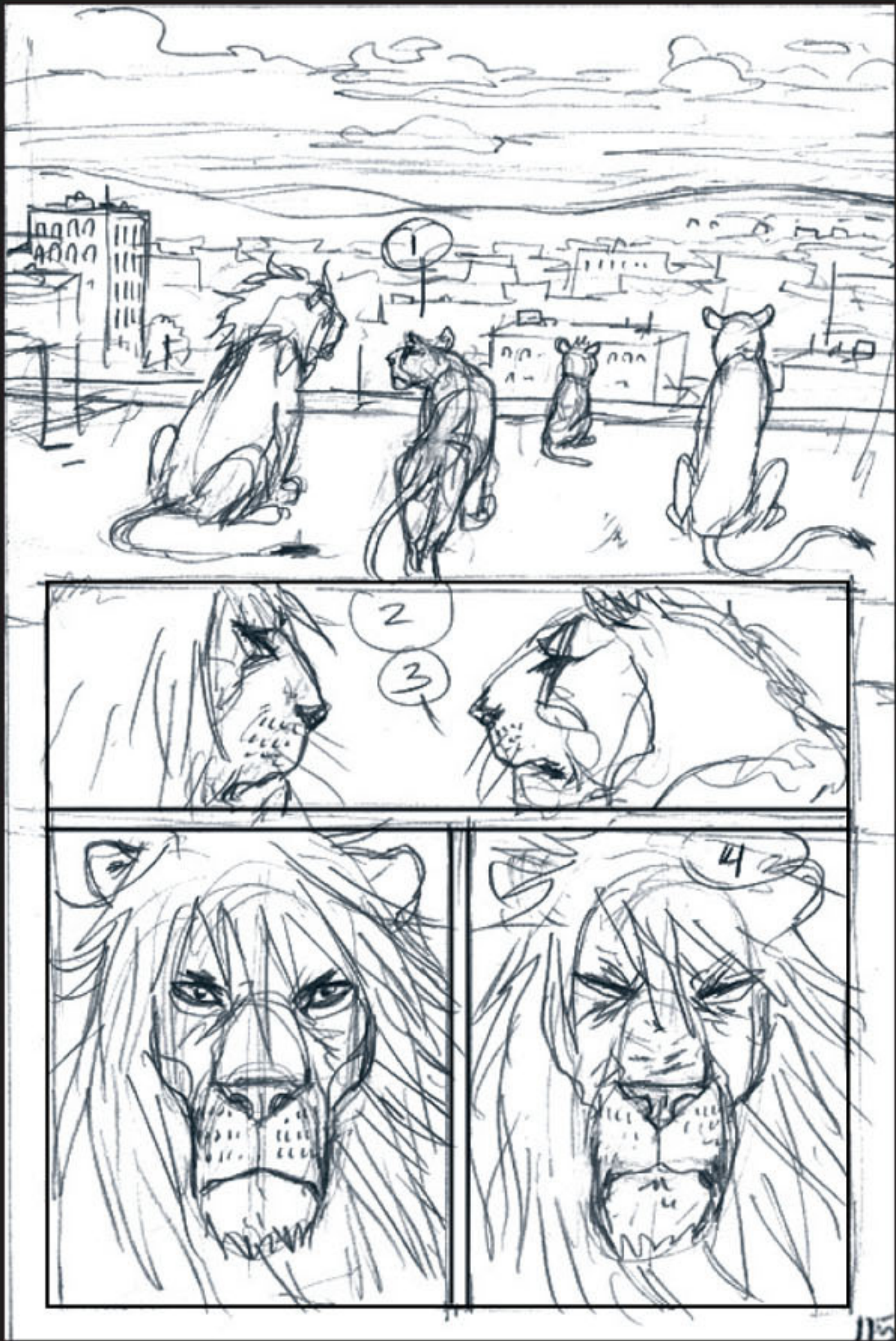


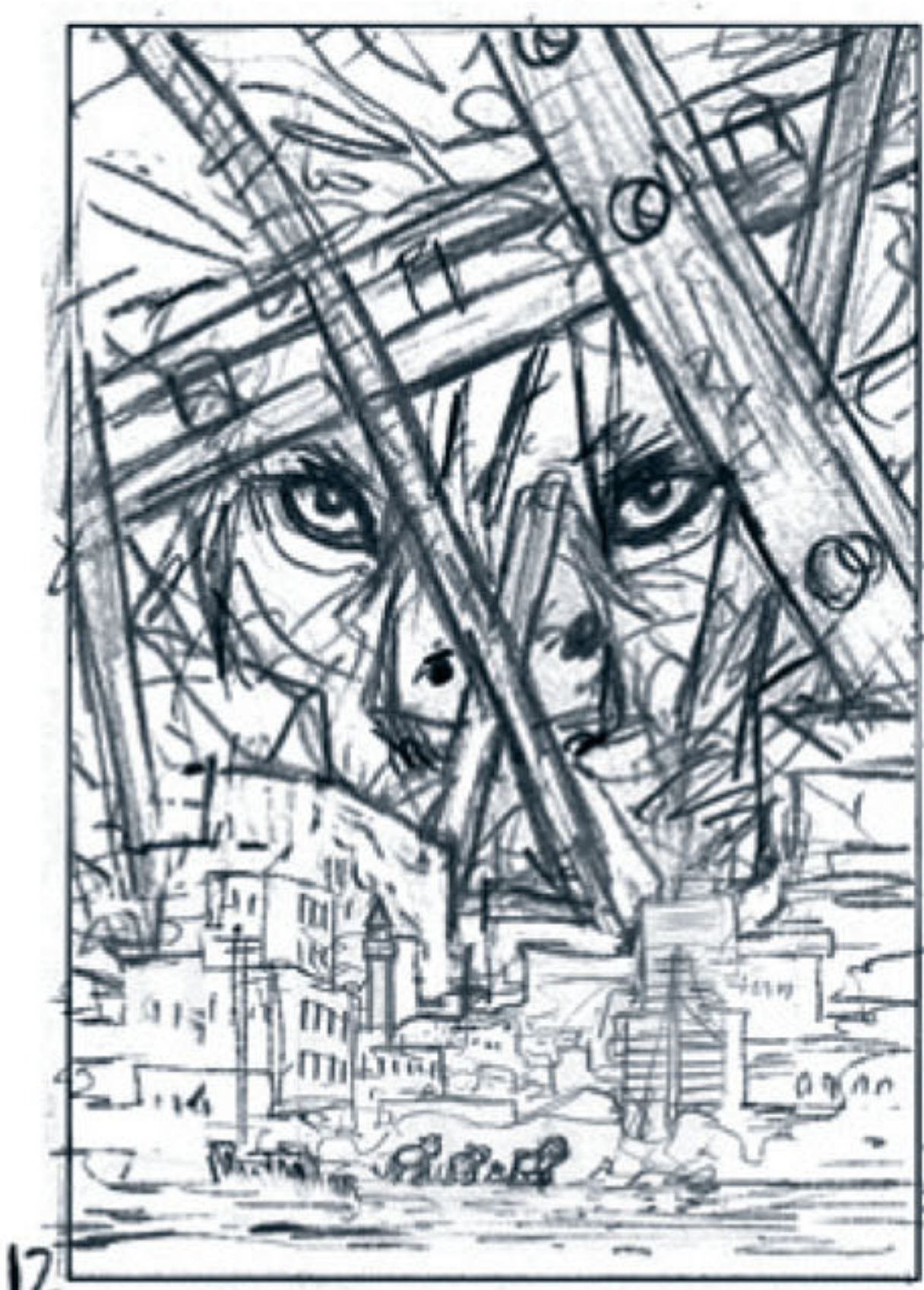
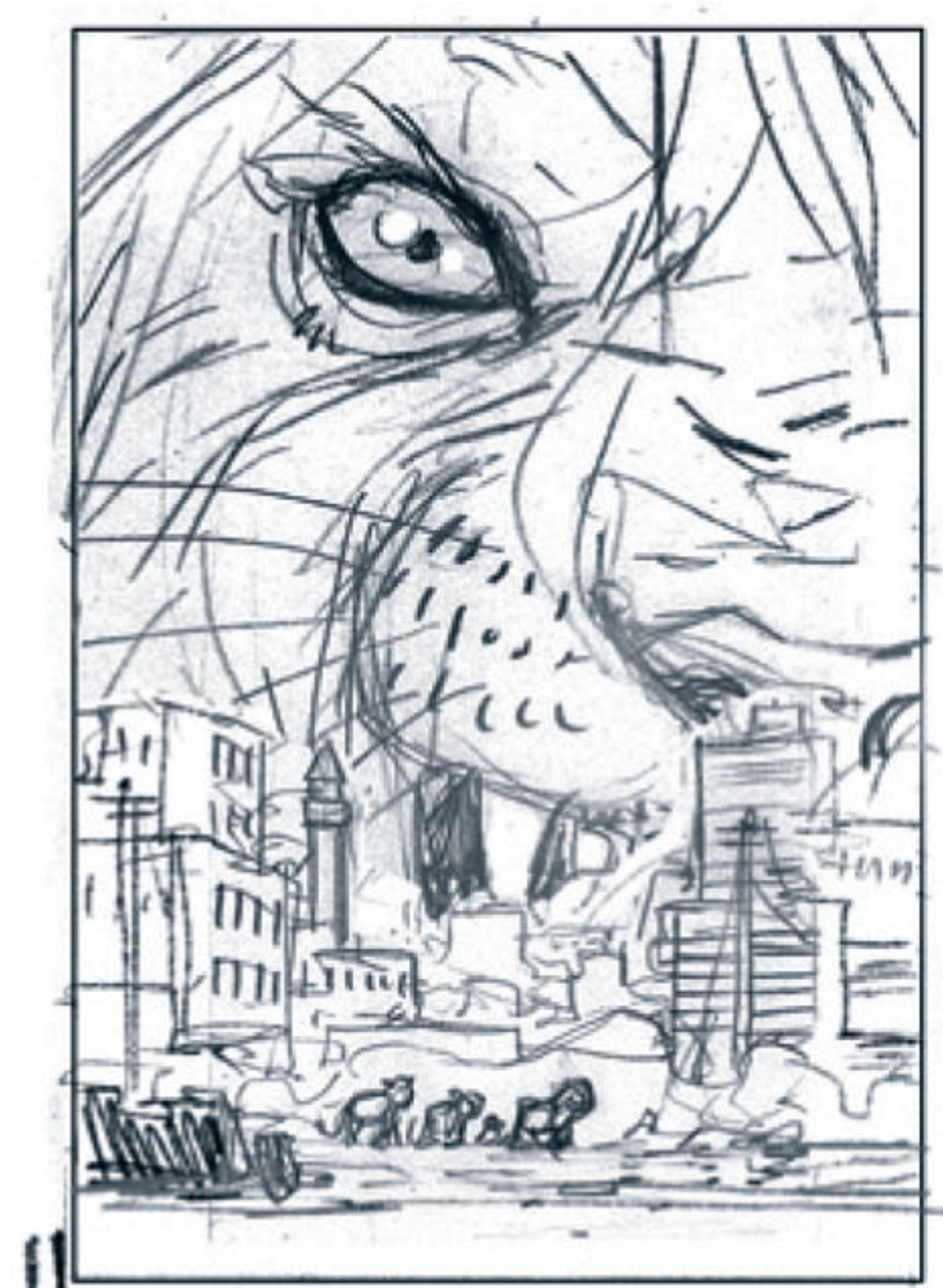
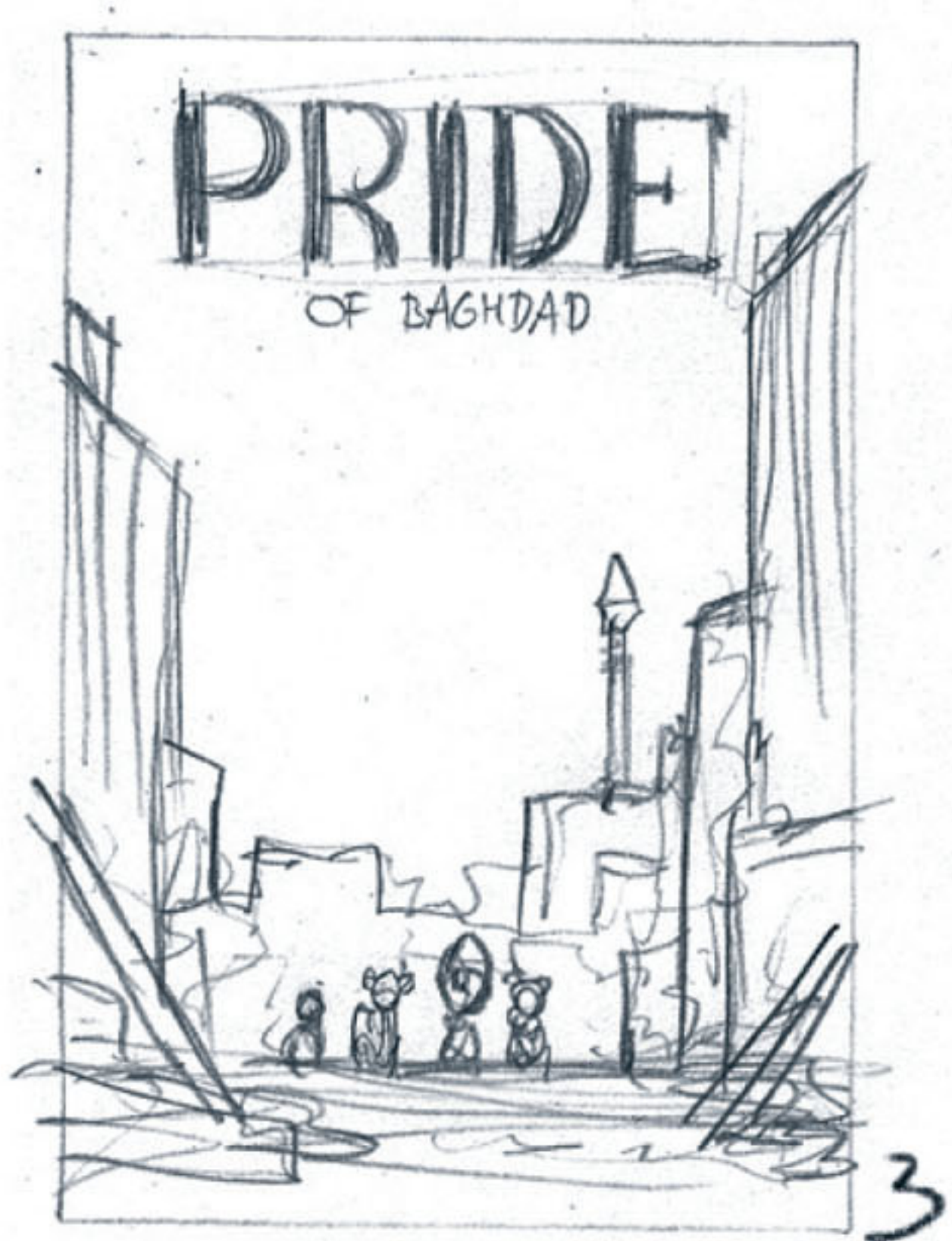
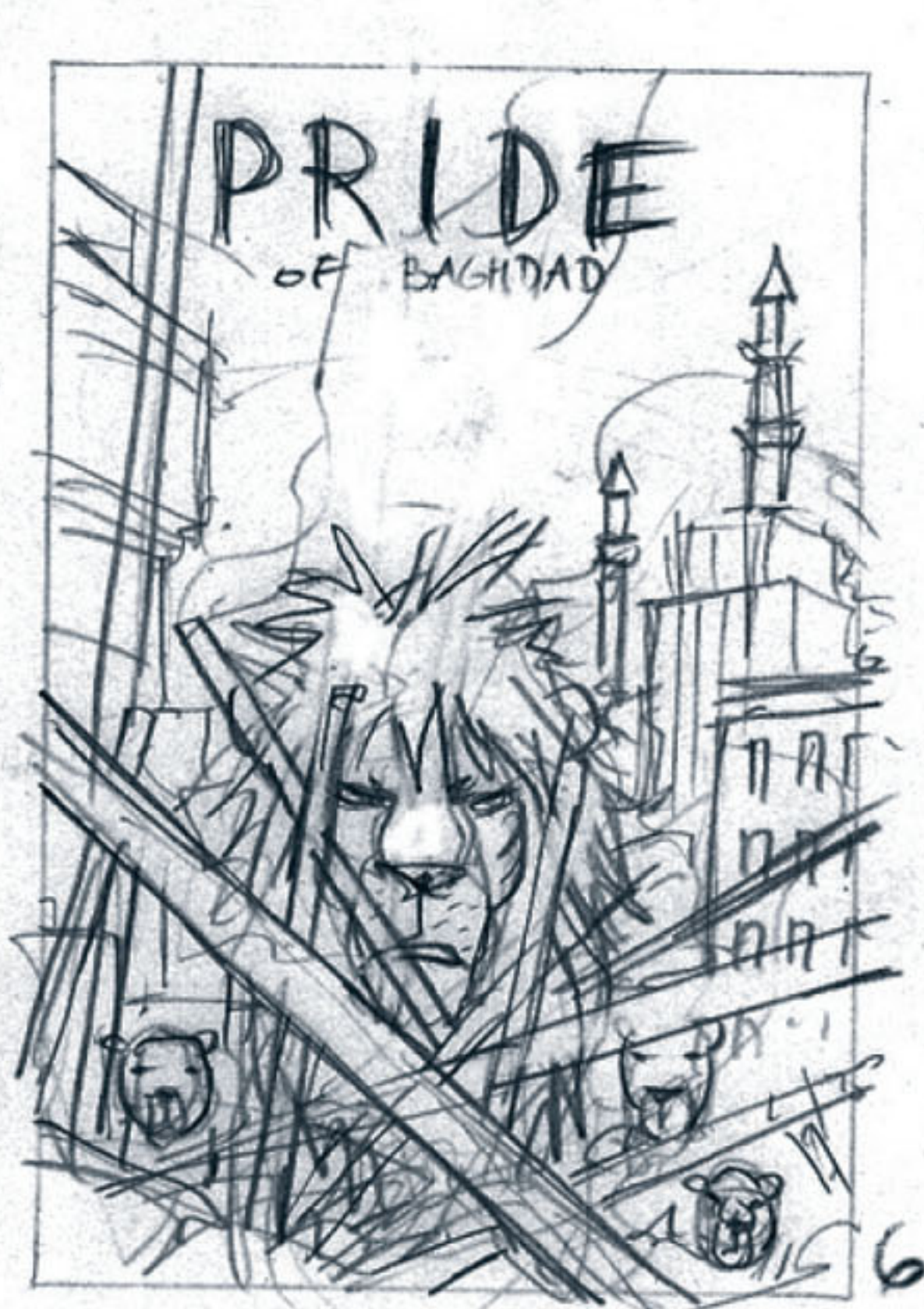
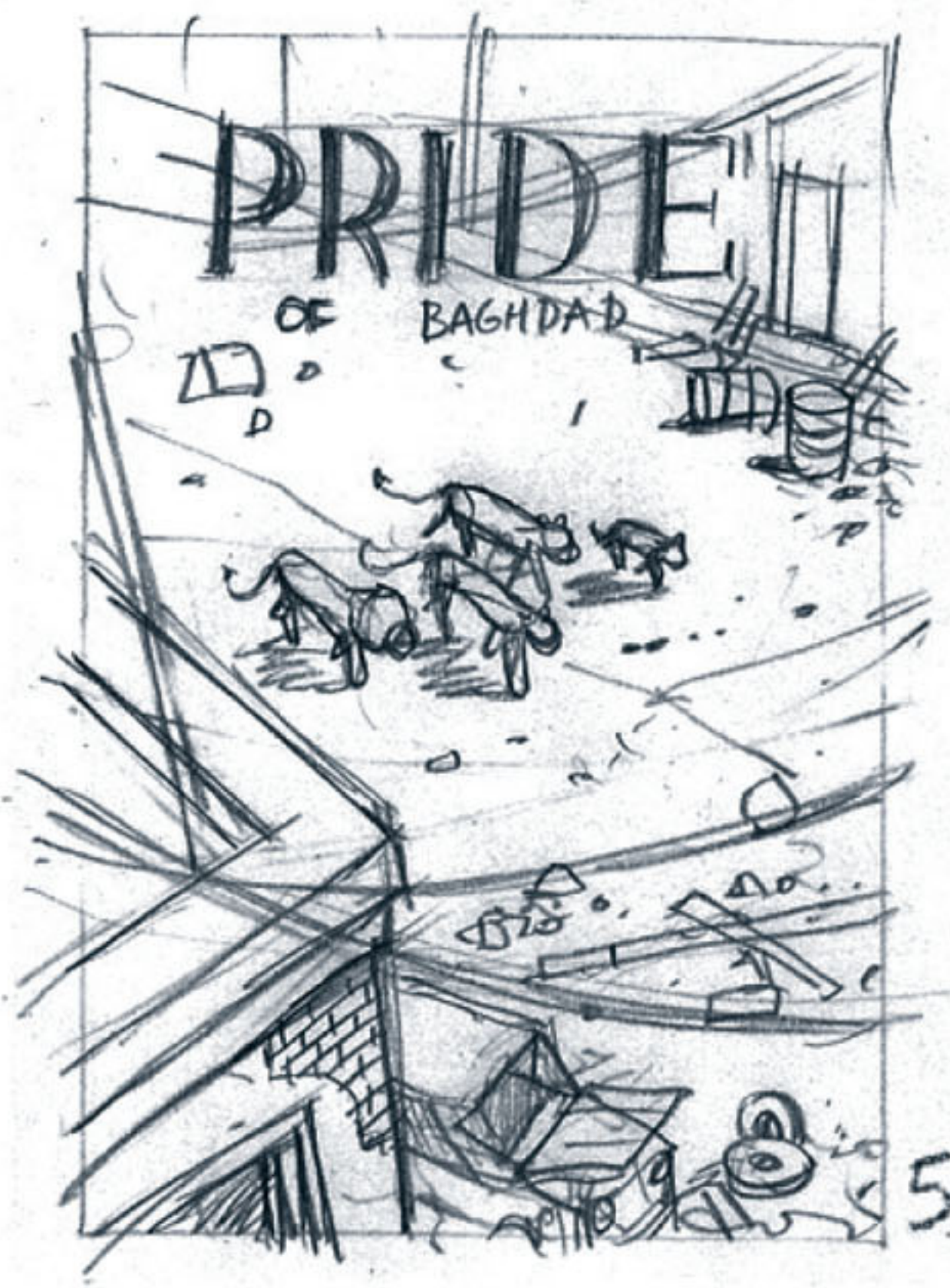


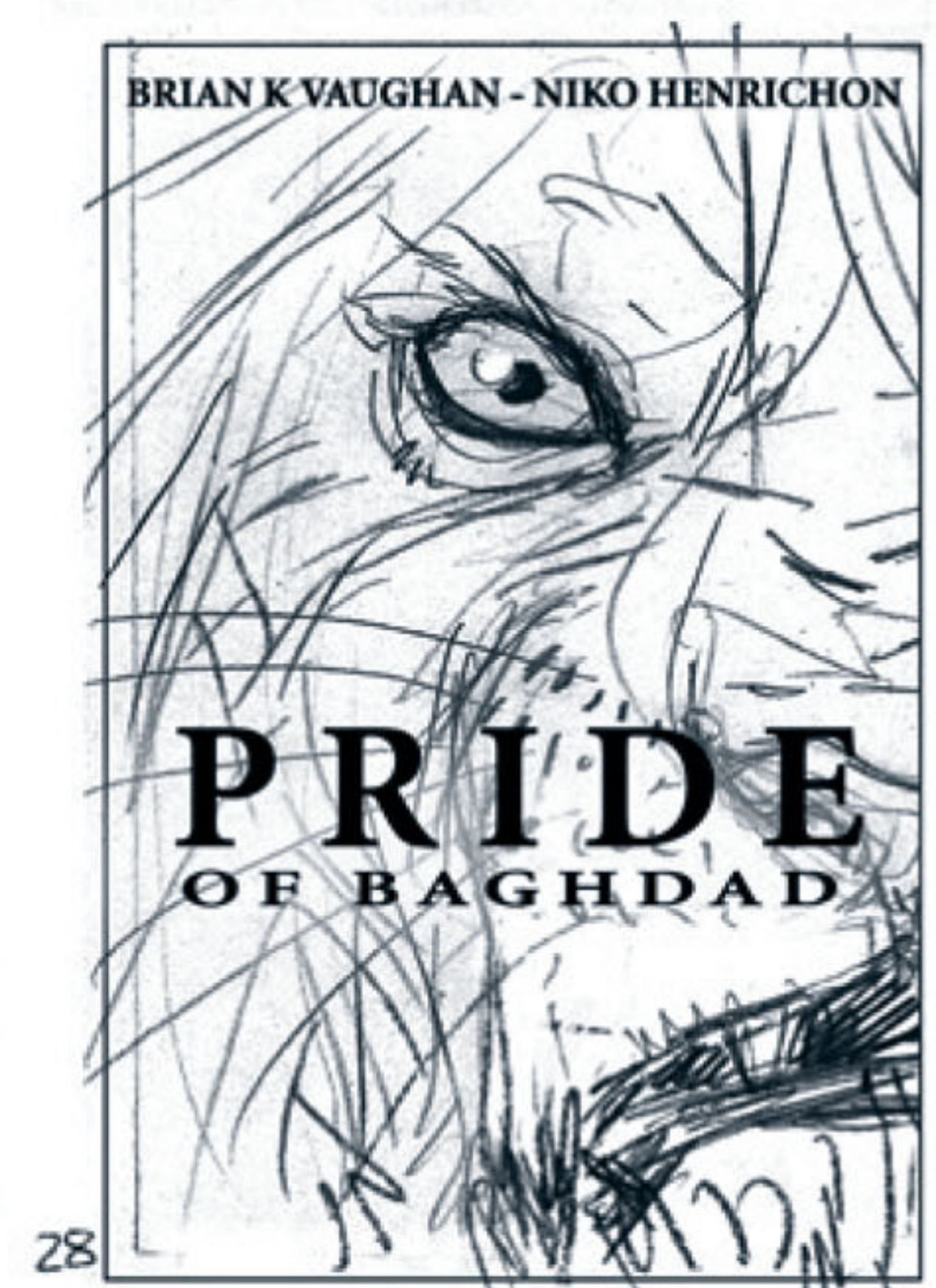
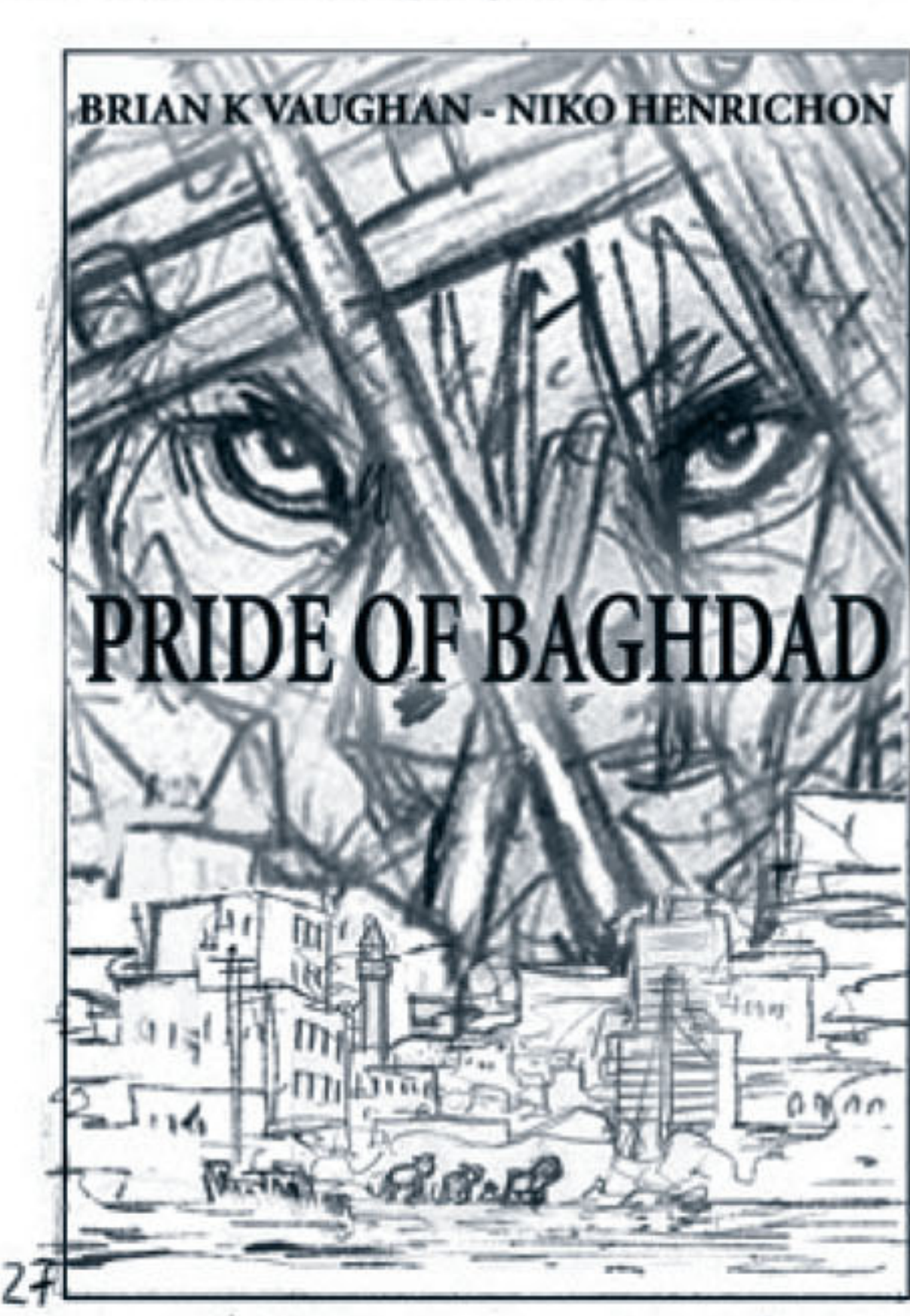
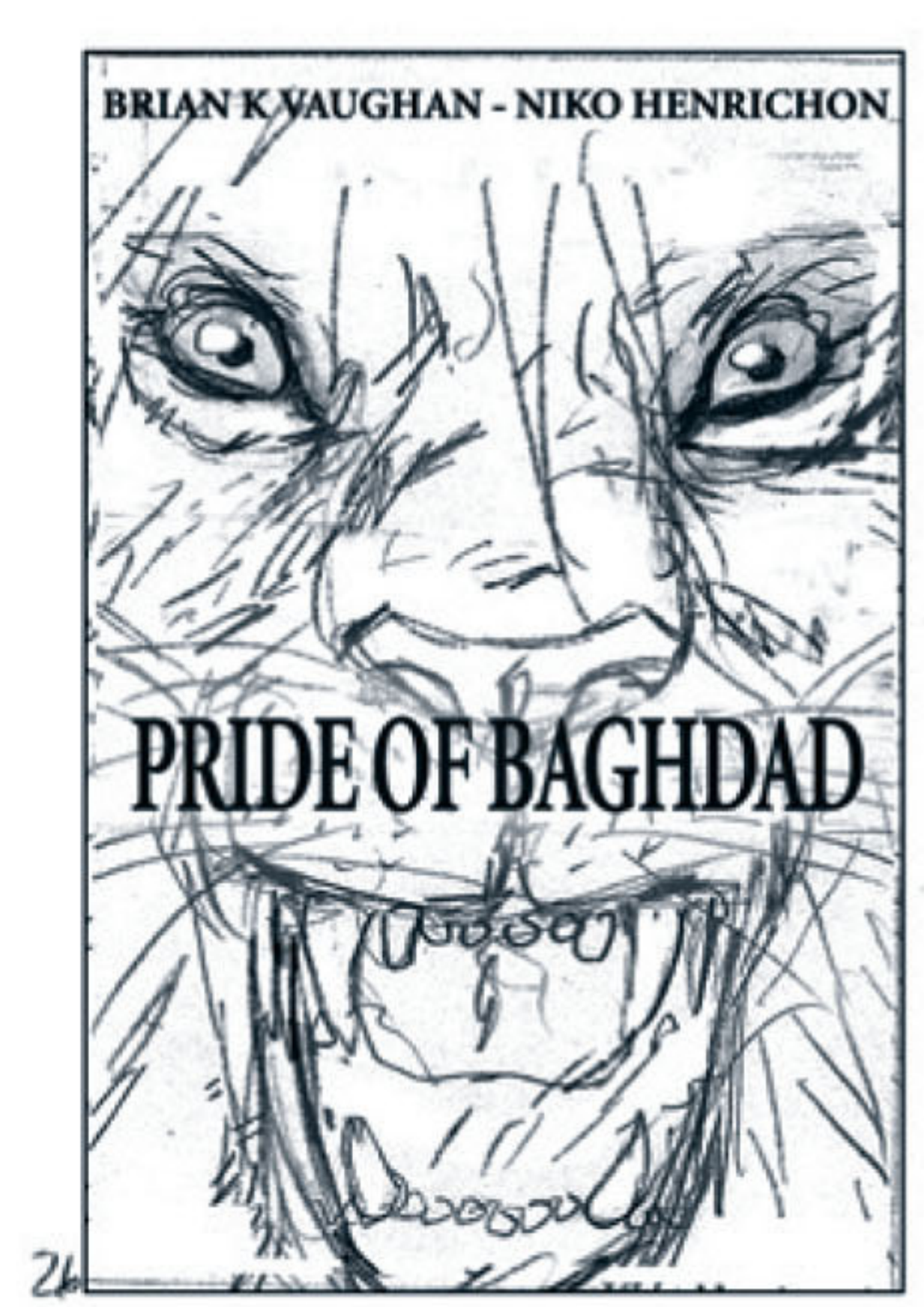
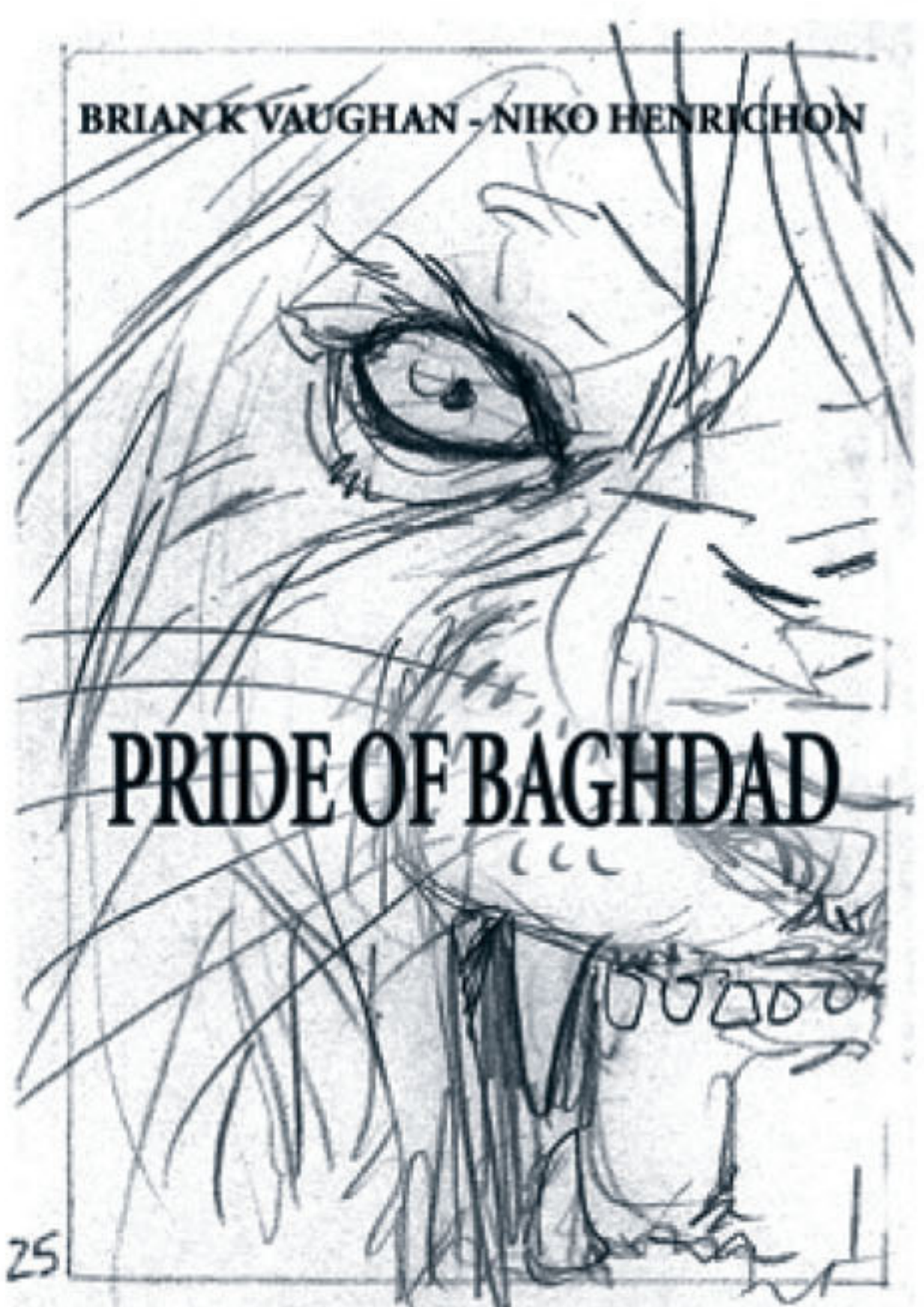
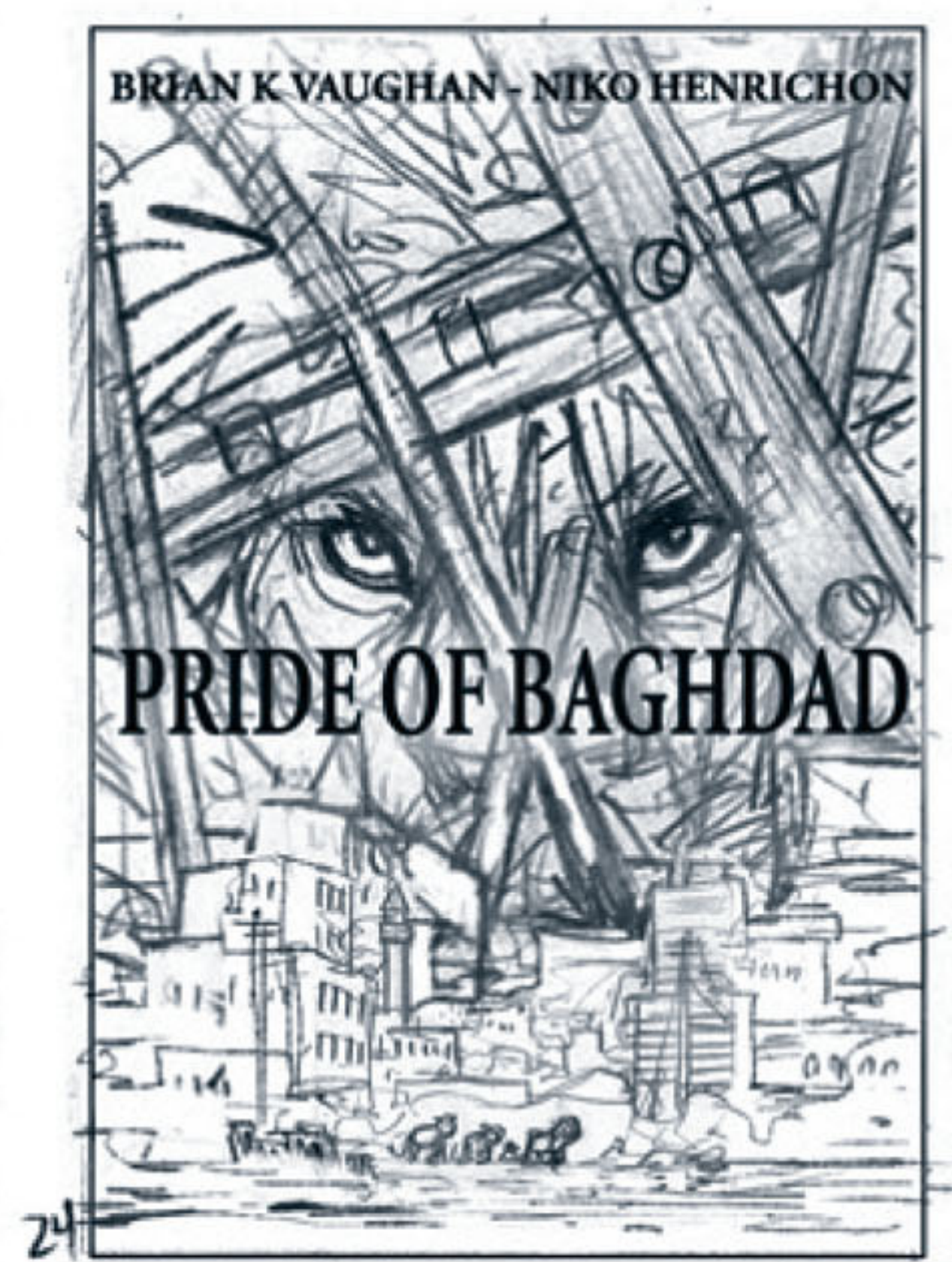
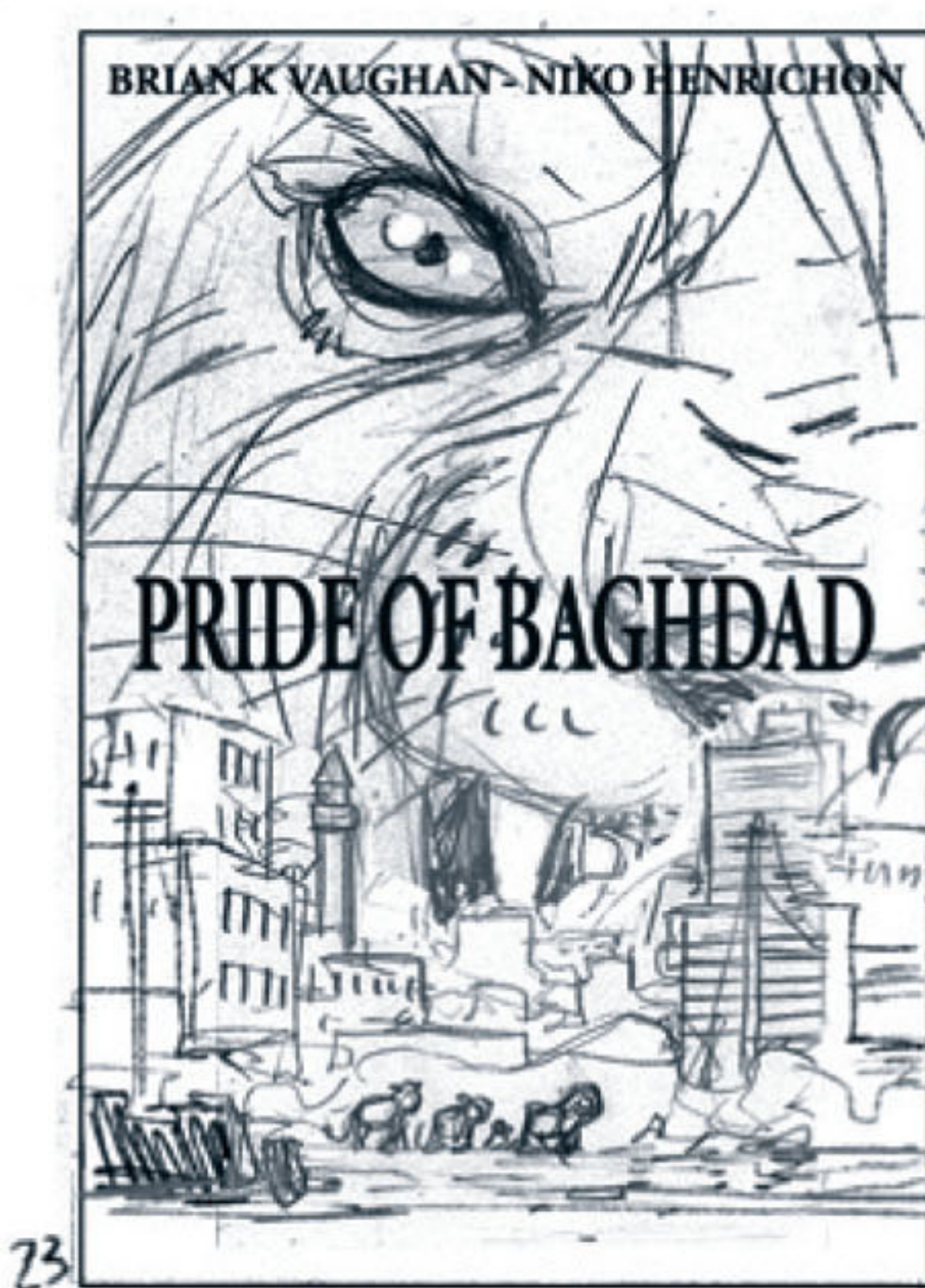
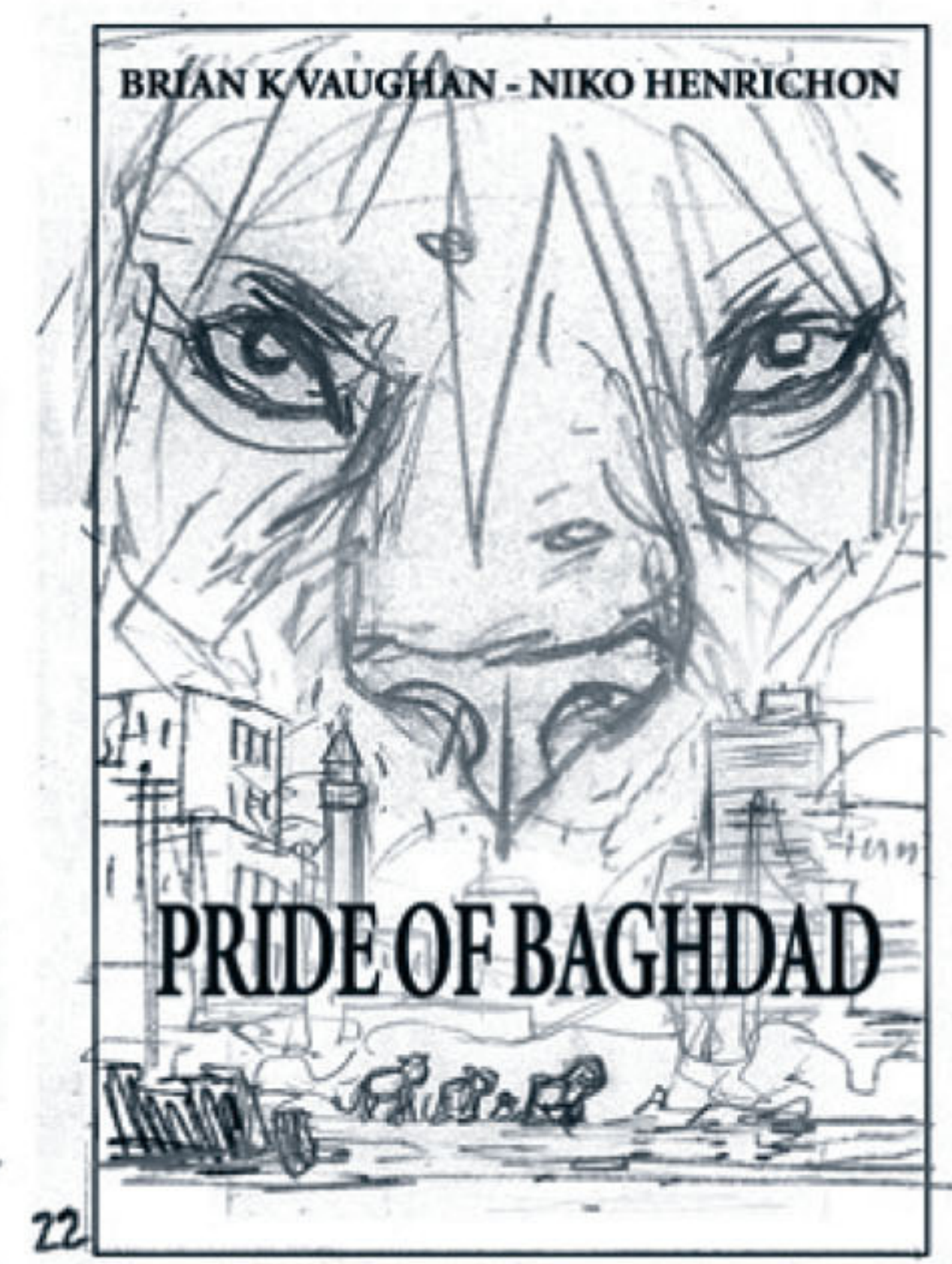
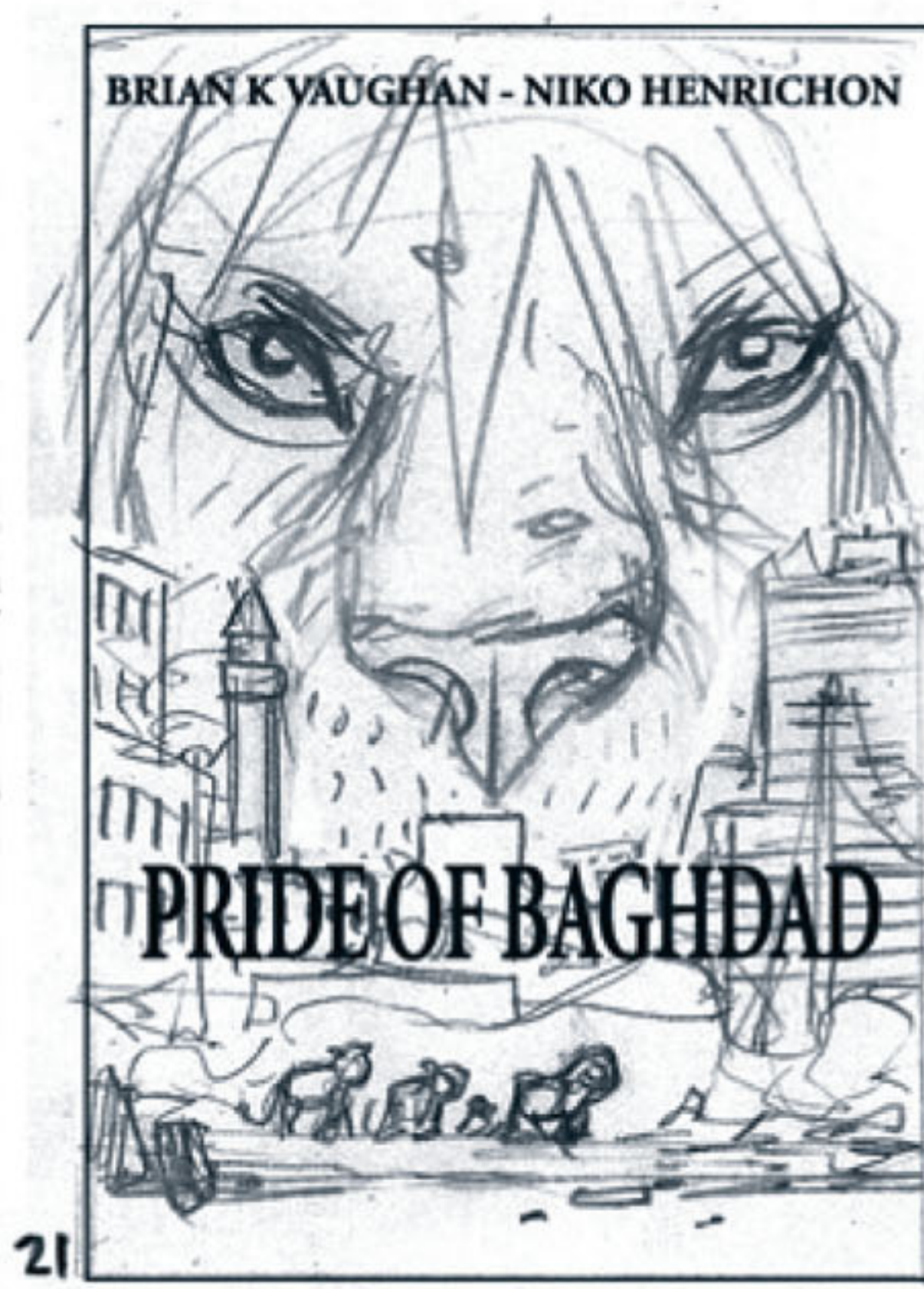
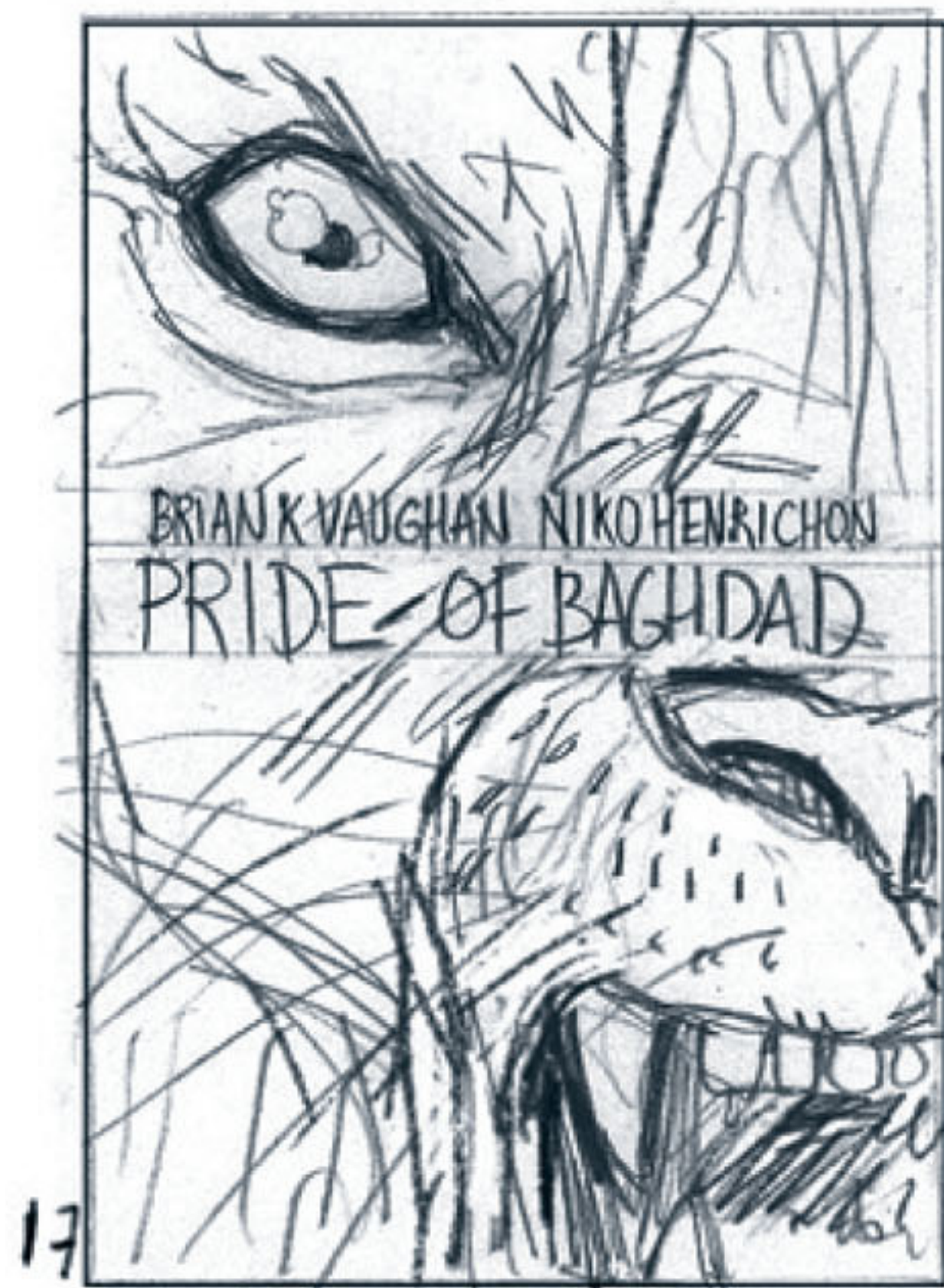


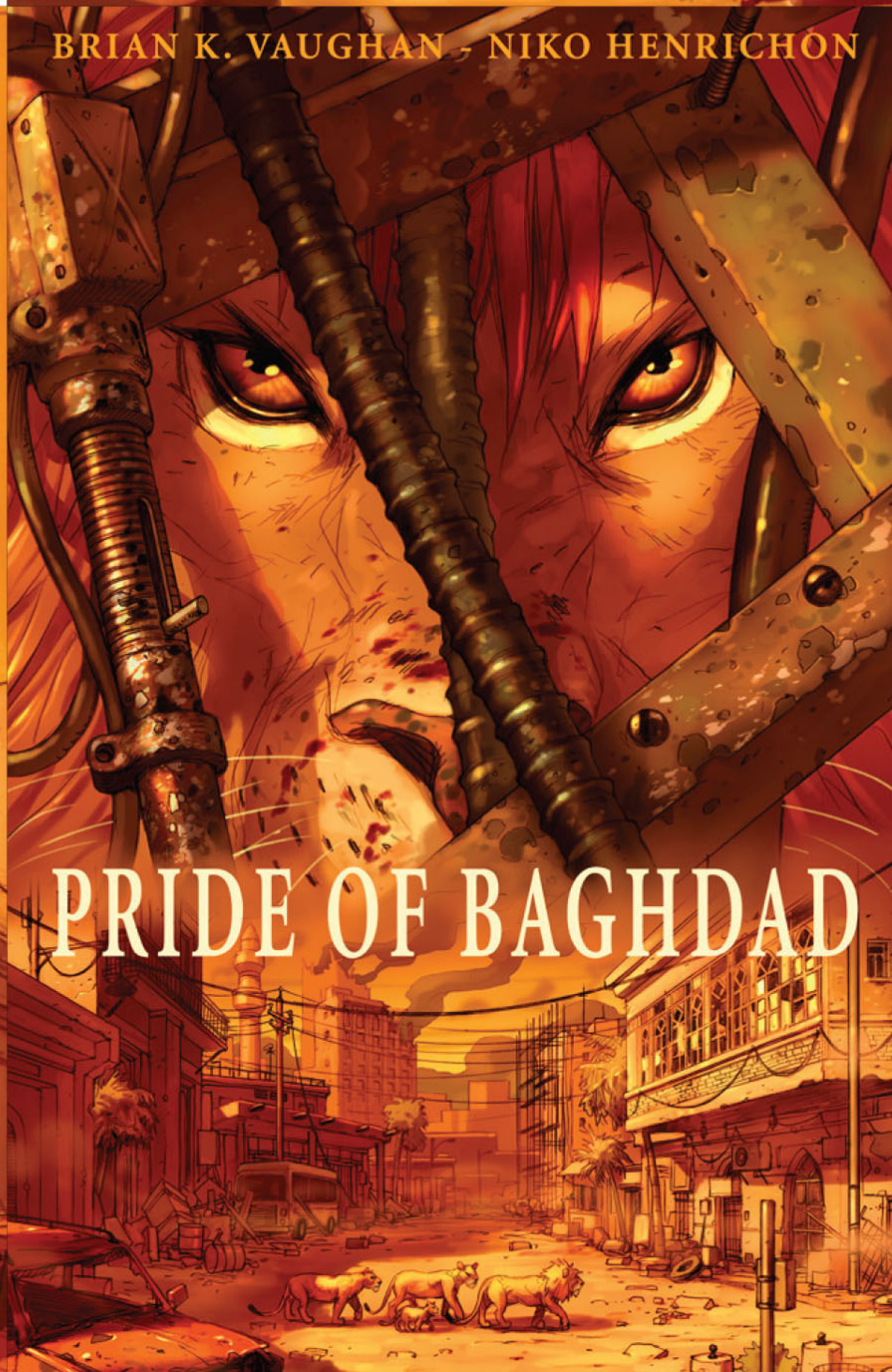
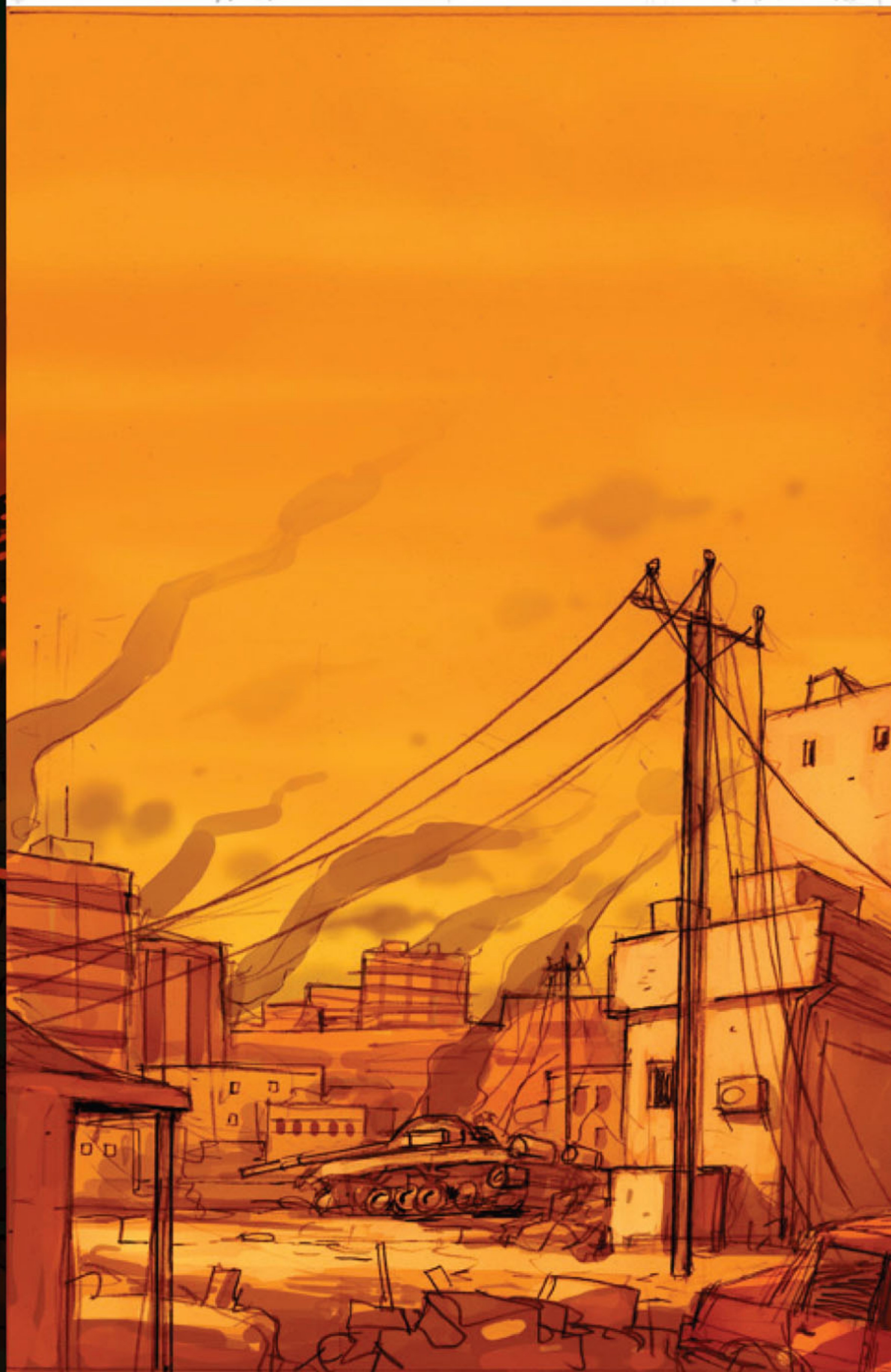
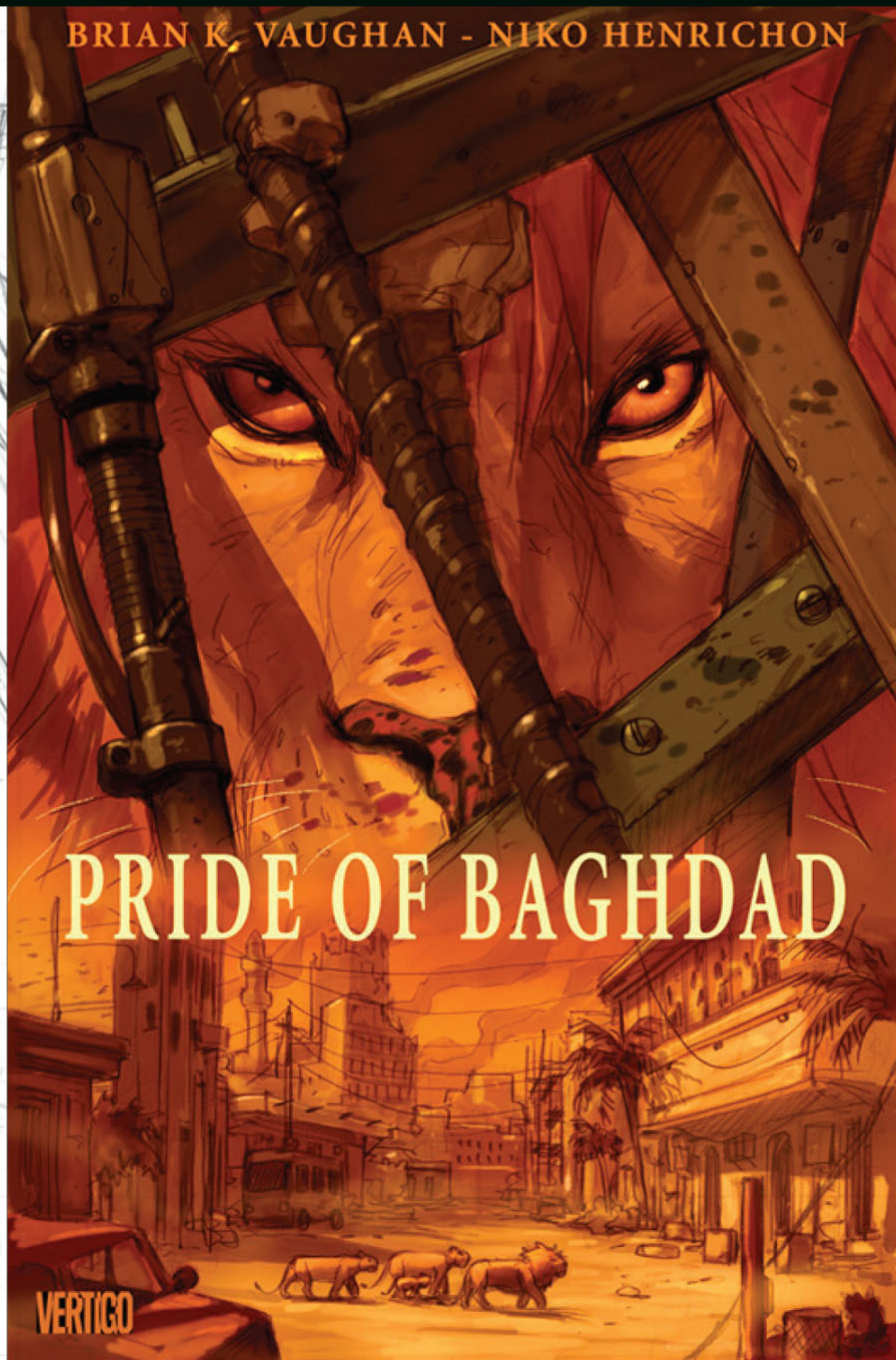














BRIAN K. VAUGHAN

I'd like to thank the following people for their assistance and/or inspiration:

I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to Chris Cutter and Sarah Scarth at the International Fund for Animal Welfare (www.ifaw.org) for putting me in touch with the incomparable Mariette Hopley, who spoke with me at length about her work leading an emergency relief team to the Baghdad Zoo back in 2003.

I'd also like to recognize the civilian population of Iraq, especially those bloggers who generously shared their experiences with the world. And very special thanks to the dedicated men and women of the United States Armed Forces, particularly everyone from the Army's 3rd Infantry Division.

This story is inspired by true events, but the interpretation and viewpoint(s) are obviously mine and Niko's and don't necessarily reflect the feelings and opinions of the many people who kindly offered us their help. Any artistic liberties are my responsibility and mine alone, as are any and all errors of fact.

Oh, and thanks to my favorite wife, Ruth McKee, for letting me borrow her membership card to the San Diego Zoo.

Brian is the Eisner Award-winning writer of Saga, Y: The Last Man, and Ex Machina.



NIKO HENRICHON

I would like to thank my friends and my family who have provided me support during the whole year it took to produce this book.

It is also important to thank the people — citizens, reporters and soldiers — who were and still are in Iraq for sharing their experience in written form or through pictures, despite the drama they are witnessing daily. I couldn't have made this book believable without them.

Niko currently lives in the south of France. Pride of Baghdad is the second of his three graphic novels.

“Simple, lavishly drawn, and devastating... Stunning.”
— **Publishers Weekly (starred review)**

“Deeply moving.”
— **Los Angeles Times Book Review**

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— **IGN**

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